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The
FIERY
DAWN

M·E·COLERIDGE



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Coleridge

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THE FIERY DAWN

THE FIERY DAWN

BY

M. E. COLERIDGE

AUTHOR OF

'THE KING WITH TWO FACES,' 'NON SEQUITUR,' ETC.

'L'histoire passe si vite!'

ALEXANDRE DUMAS PÈRE

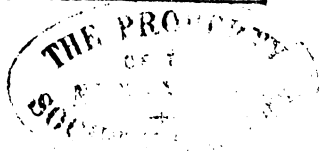
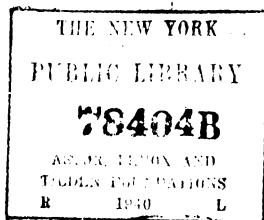
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NOTE

WRITERS of historic fictions are, for the most part, thieves. Many of the following pages have been stolen from Armand de St.-Imbert, some from Louis Blanc, a few from the 'Memoirs of Alexandre Dumas.' The chapter called 'Maison Botherel' was composed—almost every word of it—many years ago, by Lamar-tine, Feydeau, and Théophile Gautier.



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THE FIERY DAWN

INTRODUCTION

THE MILLER AND HIS MEN

It was the last night of a year the date of which is unknown, in a country that may or may not have been Holland.

It was, at any rate, a flat country, over which the radiance of rising and setting suns might stream for miles and never find so much as a hillock to cover with shadow any part of it. Go where you would, the roar of the sea was never far off; and come upon it where you would, the sea was never blue. Apparently, it resented the fact of any land at all just there. Wherever Nature gave an inch it took an ell, and far inland, among the fields, the canal water tasted brackish, and the masts of tall ships might be seen sticking up oddly out of the green grass. There was land, but land only on sufferance; in half an hour it might go back to be water again if only the sea chose. Meantime people lived in houses that looked like boats set up on end, and they built windmills. It was a fair field indeed for all the winds of heaven. From the north, from the south, from the east, from the west, they rushed across it, finding nothing to check them. The sails went round merrily, and the golden corn turned into dusty flour.

On the night in question, however, there was no wind—the sails hung slack. The rain poured down straight and steadily. The very air seemed to be rotten with damp. As a rule, at this time of year the canals were frozen, and if anything fell it was snow; but the season was warmer than usual. The canals were full—another drop would make them brim over—and still the rain went on.

In every mill but one bright lights were shining in the windows. The sound of fiddles shrieked from within, loud laughter echoed, and the thud of feet dancing heavily, though with a right good will. They were dancing and drinking the Old Year out, as the saying is.

In one alone there was no light except the smoky glimmer of an oil-lamp with an uneven wick, no sound but the sighing and yawning of the master of the mill as he sat by the fire, and now and then the wail of a very young child from the room above. His wife had died a week before.

He had never been very fond of her. He enjoyed an odd sense of liberty now that she was gone, yet he missed her, as one misses a familiar annoyance, and he had not got over the bewilderment of the sudden exchange of that stout, bustling, loud-voiced presence for the tiny creature that could not speak. Quickly, unexpectedly, before he knew where he was, a new thing had come to live in his house. He was not an imaginative man; he had made no preparation beforehand. Still less was he prepared for the departure of all that went that same day. His wife was one of those persons whose tiresomeness seems to be a guarantee of long life. It had by no means occurred to him that



she would not get well. In all his life before no change had ever happened swiftly. People, as he knew them, grew old, grew weak, grew silly—and then they died. A miracle would not have astonished him more than the fact that his wife had died short off in this way.

For some occult reason connected with his general amazement he disliked going to bed. He had only to lie down and put out the rush-light, to feel more wide awake than at any moment during the day. The darkness made him uncomfortable, yet he would not for anything have burnt a rush-light while he was in bed; it was against his instincts of economy. So he sat up for the sake of the society of the oil-lamp, and dozed uneasily on a wooden chair. In his dim, confused way he wondered at the irrational customs of mankind. Often and often, on a New Year's Eve, had he been driven out to dance and make merry when he would just as lief have stayed by his own hearthside. Now, when he would gladly have gone anywhere for the sake of seeing a human face, not one of his neighbours but would have been shocked to see him.

Before the fire lay a cat that was neither tawny nor black, with a rusty mark on her forehead. She belonged to his wife. What business had she to go on living when her mistress was dead? He was not by nature social, but he would have given something for the company of one of his own race that night. It was lonely and dark in the mill.

Hark! What was that?

The wind making sounds like a voice.

Nonsense! He was dreaming. The wind, at any rate, could not say, 'Open the door.' The voice did.

It was the strangest voice that he had ever heard, for it was high and low both at once.

‘Open! open!’ it cried again, still with the same double sound. It was human—there was no mistake about that.

He went quickly and unbarred the door. A dark figure, wrapped in a riding-cloak, from which the rain was streaming, stood outside. As he looked, a part detached itself, and he saw that there were two figures.

One moved aside to let the other pass first, but the taller and stouter seized the arm of the younger and more slightly built, and both crossed the threshold at the same moment.

The miller was somewhat taken aback. Who were they?

‘Gentlemen,’ said he, ‘if this be a frolic, you have come to the wrong house.’

‘Frolic or no frolic, right house or wrong, here I intend to stay,’ said the taller of the two.

The younger looked up appealingly; he was not much more than a boy. They seemed to be brothers, the miller thought, as they stepped within the circle of the glimmering oil-lamp. The next moment he changed his mind. No two men could be more unlike. About one thing, however, he felt certain—he did not want either of them under his roof. He was not fond of novelty; he had had more of it than he liked during the last few days. These two men were as different from any men that he had ever seen as his wife dead was different from his wife living. He lost no time in asking the question that one man puts to another when he wishes to make an enemy of him:

‘Can you pay?’

Thereupon the elder man asked a question that has not always proved conducive to amicable relations either:

‘Of what faith are you?’

‘As good a Christian as other men, I hope,’ returned the miller.

‘I thought you were a Jew.’

The miller said nothing. Irony was a dead language to him—less, indeed: for had the stranger spoken Hebrew he would have known that he did not understand, whereas now he took the observation as a simple statement of fact.

‘If anything could make all men brothers, such a night as this should do so,’ said the younger man, shivering. ‘I would not turn a dog from the door.’

Nor would the miller have done so, for the matter of that. He shrugged his shoulders.

‘Dog yourself!’ cried the older man. ‘Dog in the manger! We want neither food nor drink. We ask not so much as a crust. We do not even desire a bed. All that we would have is, leave to sit by your fireside until the day dawns. We can pay, however.’

With a sudden violent action that took the miller by surprise, he tore out of his waistcoat pocket, for which it was too big, a snuff-box of dull black horn, and flung it on the table. His hands were large and strong.

‘We can give more than that,’ said the younger man. He detached from his watch-chain a little key of silver, polished until it shone like a moonbeam between his thin white fingers.

‘Which will you have? The snuff-box will repay you at once, the key not till you find the lock that it

fits—which may happen in three months or in thirteen months, according to the state of the weather.’

The miller had taken up the snuff-box, and was weighing it suspiciously in one hand; he stretched out the other for the key.

‘No,’ said the younger man, drawing back, ‘not both. Which?’

The miller relinquished the snuff-box; it was light for its size, and there was nothing inside, clearly.

‘Take care of it,’ said the younger man, as he let go the key. ‘Remember what I say. In three months—or in thirteen months—if you find the lock that it fits, you will have made your fortune.’

This was an unfortunate phrase. The miller had few convictions, but one of the strongest of them was, that people who were about to ruin you always said you were going to make a fortune.

There was a pause.

‘No,’ he said at last, restoring the key. ‘I’ll not have it. I’ll have payment in honest coin of the realm, or else out you go.’

The younger man said something in a foreign language; the elder shrugged his shoulders, and turned to the miller again.

‘My friend reminds me that we are not yet at the end of our resources,’ he said. ‘Money we have not got and cannot give—you must understand that. You refuse us shelter on a night when to do so is to be answerable for the consequences. That does not touch you? Good! You refuse our offers of payment because you are afraid of the discovery of anything that belonged to us in your house? Good! But you will not escape. It is already well known by cer-

tain persons that we have come hither. Inquiries will be made. The mere fact that you have the reputation of a churl, and that it cannot be proved that you took any payment, will not acquit you. Now, I have something to propose: let us sit here till morning. In the long hours that must pass—the younger man shivered slightly—‘we let fall certain words that you are careful to remember. I will tilt my chair backwards when it becomes important that you should notice what we say; my friend will tilt his forwards when it ceases to be so. With the first glimmer of the dawn we quit this hospitable roof. You will never see us again; but when you are questioned, say that we came here at dead of night, that we insisted on remaining, that, being one man to two, you could not expel us, that you would take no payment, that, listening at the keyhole, you overheard what you shall overhear without the trouble of doing that. A word is a light thing. What is it? A little breath that leaves no trace in the air even. Yet it outweighs gold. Play your cards as badly as you will, and you are sure of fifty or sixty pounds. If your memory serves you, if you play them well, you may double the sum. Is it a bargain?’

The miller hesitated. All his savings did not amount to more than thirty pounds, and the funeral had made a large hole in them. At last he nodded sullenly. Thirty pounds apiece would, without doubt, be good pay for the hospitality which he had not offered; yet an undefined feeling haunted him that it was dearly bought. He set the best chairs in the room by the fire, and retired himself to a deal bench on the other side of the kitchen table.

'Begin,' said the elder man, laughing, after a long silence.

'I cannot,' said the younger impatiently, glancing at the stolid face of the miller.

'Go to sleep, bumpkin!' said the other. 'Have the grace to pretend to do so, at least.'

The miller dropped his head upon his hands; he could see well enough between the chinks of his fingers.

'What a cat!' continued the elder man, poking the animal with his foot. 'Good heavens, what a cat!' He spoke as if it irritated him almost beyond endurance.

Perhaps he irritated the cat in the same way. She gave an angry hiss, as much as to say, 'Good heavens, what a man!' bounded on to his knee, inflicted as sharp a scratch as she knew how, and made off again with her tail in the air. He seemed to be pleased rather than otherwise.

'Who would have thought, now, that the wretched starved creature had life enough in it for that?'

'They have a wonderful amount of vitality. I did not know how much until I drowned a kitten the other day. Bah! how it struggled!' He made a gesture with his hands as though he were holding something down under the water. 'A murderer might have felt as I did.'

'The time will come when the murderer will be looked upon as the only preserver of his race. We are increasing too fast, that is certain. We know too much to have the plague; we love each other too well to fight. Battle and sickness have slain their thousands. Now it is the turn of peace and prosperity,

and they will slay their tens of thousands. The earth will be overrun; it will become a vast hospital of the dying. There is no chance but in the private murderer.'

'An ancient prejudice against him exists, however.'

'As against every wholesome person—*that* goes for nothing.'

The older man tilted his chair back; the miller was all attention.

'Have you heard from the Countess?'

'I have.'

'Does she agree with me?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

The young man only raised his eyebrows.

'Will she betray me?'

'Every man has his price. A woman can be bought for less than a man, though we have done away with slave-markets. You ought to know that.'

'What message did she send?'

'Only these words: *Quand tu le voudras*.'

Another creak. The younger man had tilted his chair forwards.

'She is a woman of many words, but when she means anything she uses few.'

'A very charming young woman. I have a deep respect for her.'

The steam from the soaked garments of the night wanderers rose up around them as they drew closer to the fire, and almost hid them from view. They said little else.

Settling down as well as they could in their hard chairs, they lay back and closed their eyes. The cat

purred softly to herself. Soon, by his regular breathing, the older man seemed to be asleep. The miller watched so long and so vigorously that he, too, fell asleep at last, worn out with the effort, for it is very wearisome to watch nothing.

He awoke with a start. Was it part of a dream that he saw—not two figures, but only one reflected in the dusty mirror over the mantelpiece? Was it part of a dream that he saw the younger man creeping along the wall by the side of the dresser, that he suddenly stood erect, sprang back to his place by the fire, and in a moment fell fast asleep again?

The miller peered through his fingers at the older man. He had not so much as changed his position, but he was not breathing. Another moment, and the long measured breaths began again. The miller slept no more.

As the first gray light of morning shivered in through the casement the child in the room above woke up and cried. The two men by the fire started as if they had been shot.

‘What is that?’ they said both together.

They were as pale as death. The miller rose and moved towards the door. He had a vague fear that their presence in some way threatened the child; he felt that he was its father. They both laughed.

‘It is high time that we were gone,’ said the elder.

They put on their hats, fastened their cloaks round them, and departed. The miller was careful not to look which way they went.

CHAPTER I

THE POET SEEKS HIS OWN

It is said that, when a man is on his way from one friend to another, the intervening period of the journey is spent in thought, half at the house which he has left, half at the house to which he is going. So it was with Lucien Sylvestre.

As he rattled along in the hot, crowded *diligence*—as yet the iron horses were not—he seemed to himself to be sitting on a yet harder seat than that beneath him, in a wretched attic, and he heard, not the creaking of the wheels and the snores of the passengers, but the gruff, abrupt voice of a young fellow about his own age, who said the same thing over and over again. Wonderful is the power of anyone possessed of fortitude and patience enough to do this!

Socrates, according to later philosophers, owed much of his authority to the use of the method. Women, however, as a general rule, understand it better than men; they are keener to discount the value of appearances. It was most probably a woman who first found out that a drop of water wears away stone. A man may seem to be impervious as the rock to a certain idea, but let him only become addicted to the society of someone who will reiterate it day after day, night after night, and ten to one it will work its way into him at last, more especially if, like Lucien, he

never can succeed in saying the same thing twice himself.

At first, when his friend the journalist ventured to suggest to him that his friend the marquis was playing him false, he became indignant, furious—it was ‘impossible.’ On the next occasion, when Blum threw out a hint to the same effect, he could not adopt the same line of defence—it was ‘highly improbable.’ The next time he asserted that he could see no motive. The fourth time he declared that, even if it were so, he should be the last man in the world to take any steps; the fifth time, that the evidence of his own senses would not convince him that it was true. And, having said this, he started off the day following, to give his senses a chance.

Now, the result of this action was startling, and it provoked discussion afterwards among Lucien’s acquaintance. Gentlemen considered that he had done wisely, if not well. Ladies, on the other hand—young ladies even more vehemently than other ladies—protested that he ought never to have behaved as he did. Perhaps the initial mistake lay in the fact of his having two intimate friends. If he had had one, or three, he would not have been pulled opposite ways. Emotion, like everything else, is very much a matter of arithmetic.

For hours he kept up an imaginary conversation with Blum in such a brilliant style of monologue *à deux*, that even Walter Savage Landor, who was writing about that time, could not have improved upon it. He said all the things that Blum never said. He gave himself—always under the guise of Blum—so many excellent reasons why de Civrac must with-

out doubt be playing him false, that in the end he was quite convinced. Probabilities? Why, they were all in Blum's favour. Motives? Why, there was any number of them, once Blum had begun; the only difficulty was to stop him.

When Lyons was left further and further behind, however, when the suburbs yielded to villages, the villages to hamlets, the hamlets to fields, the fields to woods, the scene within the man within the *diligence* changed. As one dissolving view fades and melts into another, so did the attic fade and melt into a room which was, of all rooms he had ever seen, the most exquisite. The naked walls covered themselves with prints from Dürer, the boarded floor (the chinks between filled up with dust) changed to a Persian carpet, the grate was wreathed about with chiselled fruits of pomegranate and roses, the dingy windows cleared into purest crystal, until there was apparently no medium at all between the eyes of those within and the sunshine. There were books about, but not too many books. The room did not belong to them, they did not fill it from floor to ceiling and spread their own peculiar smell of fragrant silence round. The marquis was a *connoisseur*, and no enthusiast. His dainty first editions lurked under silken, embroidered curtains, on little shelves carved with appropriate devices. People did more than read and think—they talked among them; and this cannot be done with any enjoyment in your true library. Yet at the present moment the imaginary conversation there was far less easy to carry on than that in the attic. Lucien himself talked very well, but the marquis was unaccountably stupid. He seemed to have no answers whatever. Once, even,

he was on the brink of an apology, but, of course, Lucien would not permit that. He forgave him at once, and from the heart, in the most magnanimous manner; and therewith the *diligence* stopped, and he was compelled to get out. He had never been sorry to reach the end of that journey before.

It was a fine moonlight evening in April. The marquis was eccentric, and dined at eight instead of five; he reckoned that he should be in good time.

Yet, now that he was actually on the point of arriving, he shrank from it. There were two ways by which he could strike across into the long, thin poplar avenue that led to the *château*; he might go by the road, and this was the shorter; or he might take to the woods. He had never done that on former occasions—never, indeed, thought twice about it. But to-night he was possessed with a desire to walk in the woods. The more practical part of him suggested that he had found them very dark, even at sunset, when the marquis insisted on returning home by the longer round. But it was surely the most practical part which responded with the information that this was natural, because the path lay along the eastern boundary, and no light could penetrate till the moon was up. The moon was up now. So he went by the woods, and beautiful enough they were, but he did not enjoy their beauty.

As he drew near the house, it annoyed him to feel none of the eager delight in the reappearance of its familiar roof, curled outwards at both ends, which he had always experienced of old. What absurd sensitiveness was this! Why should he be forced to go through the emotions of a despicable spy, coming in

on false pretences to discover the nakedness of the land, when his sentiments towards the marquis were, as he assured himself over and over again, completely unchanged. For all that, he rang the bell as if he were ashamed.

‘Why, Monsieur Lucien!’ the old butler said, ‘who would have thought it was you?’

He had not gone near the place for a long time, but he felt sure of his welcome there; for all his doubts, it had never occurred to him to doubt concerning that.

The marquis showed more pleasure than surprise at the sight of his younger friend, who was wont to come whenever he liked—sometimes very often, sometimes after a more or less prolonged period of absence. It is true that, since the beginning of their acquaintance, he had never kept away for so many months together. Lucien thought that the marquis ought to have been astonished. To a man of warm feeling the occasion called for some display of more than ordinary gratification. They should not have sat down to dinner almost at once.

The marquis could not endure the unadorned prose of simple roast and boiled: he held that a good cook is only another kind of poet, and he had secured the services of a *cordón bleu* who was the wonder of all his guests. The salary of this cook was discussed far and wide throughout the Department, but the marquis himself asserted that wages had nothing to do with it. He cherished a favourite theory that people are what you make them. He believed that his cook was the best in the country, and his cook responded to that belief.

‘Ah!’ he sometimes said, with a sigh, ‘if anyone had ever believed that I was good for anything——’

He did not finish the sentence, leaving it to his hearers to fill up the blank *I might have been* with any great name that they chose.

‘Why do you not believe in yourself?’ Lucien once asked him. ‘I have heard that genius is nothing more than that.’

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

‘And I have heard,’ said he, ‘that genius is the capacity for taking pains. But the man who made that definition was no more a genius than the author you quote, *mon cher!*’

That was in the days when talk was easy between the two.

‘You will take some *bisque?*’ said the marquis, as they sat down to table.

‘If you please!’ said Lucien, and could not, for the life of him, think of anything else to say. His lips had no language of their own; they were of no use to him whatever, when his mind happened to be busy with something that was not words. As for concealing his thoughts behind his speech, he could as soon have concealed his nose. The particular words that he wished to utter could not, it appeared, be said over the soup. Soup, however good, is not an inspiring form of nourishment. It disposes rather to calm, rhythmic reflection between regular spoonfuls. He decided that he would speak as soon as fish appeared.

So the soup came and went, and not another syllable was exchanged.

Salmon, to the accompaniment of a sauce undreamed of in any but the *haute cuisine*, appeared in due course.

Whoso hath not seen that sauce hath not partaken of eggs and cream as they are when the gods partake of them. Lucien then became conscious that the butler was in the room—that he could not speak before a third person. Perhaps the marquis was conscious of it too, for he began to talk a little on his own account, obviously for the benefit of the butler, telling himself what he expected to get for his hay in the autumn, when a particular apple would be ripe in the orchard, and other gentle, domestic facts of that kind. He might have been whistling for anything that Lucien understood.

An *entrée* followed, adorned with a new kind of tomato, grown in a hot-house, of the same glowing scarlet as the old, but of the shape of a small and delicate pear. Lucien helped himself absently, not because he felt hungry, but because he needed mechanical occupation.

For the same reason he disposed of a portion of the *rôti*, still in profound silence. The marquis had abandoned his hay—even his apples. Good heavens! was there a pudding still to come? There was indeed, an exquisite pudding, white as a snow mountain that should open suddenly and discover treasures of golden apricot. The marquis spared him none of it. Macaroni with cheese followed; it came up bubbling.

‘Like the Castalian fount!’ sighed the marquis. ‘But the cheese should have been Parmesan.’

A dish of purple grapes—the light reflected from their shining globes—followed. What more? A pineapple.

The Seven Ages of Dinner at last concluded, they withdrew to the library, and there coffee was served.

Surely, surely, it was impossible to eat or drink anything further, and the butler could not, on any pretext, return now. Yet Lucien seemed to be no nearer saying what he had it at heart to say—nor, indeed, anything else.

The marquis asked him several questions. He answered at random or not at all. Now that he had not even the semblance of a reason for remaining silent, the silence seemed to grow into a palpable wall between them. At length he began to hum Offenbach's 'Fortunio.' The marquis' taste in music was classical. When Lucien had hummed for a quarter of an hour, he tapped upon his black snuff-box, and said:

'I have heard that before.'

The wall fell swiftly, as it had risen.

'I want to speak to you about something,' said Lucien.

'Ah!' said the marquis. 'I thought so. That is why you have not spoken five words since you entered the house, I suppose?'

'When did I come here last?'

'We keep but little count of time here; it is not worth while. But I remember that the leaves were green.'

'Eleven months ago. I do not think that I have ever been away so long before.'

'No?' said the marquis indifferently.

'Do you happen to recollect the subject of our conversation the night before I left?'

'Perfectly.'

'It is so long since that I thought you might perhaps have forgotten.'

'Eh, *mon ami*, I am older than you, but I am not in

my second childhood yet. It is the pendulum in my own breast that marks time for me, not the clock on the mantelpiece. Something that you read aloud that evening made it strike the hour, and, to me, only a few minutes have passed since.'

The veiled compliment brought back to Lucien an echo of the delight of his heart when first the marquis noticed him and he felt, and felt rightly, that the notice of such a man was in itself distinction.

'Mere flattery!' said the voice of Blum. 'He makes a fool of you.'

Blum was a wholesale, not a retail dealer in praise. But, after all, Blum was at Lyons.

'Monsieur le marquis,' said Lucien, 'tell me truly, what did you think of—of the thing that I read you?'

'I thought that it was the best poem by a young man of your age since Villon.'

'Are you still of that opinion?'

'I see no reason to change it,' said the marquis. 'Good words are like wine. They grow better by keeping, not worse.'

'Can you recollect the name of the thing? I have forgotten.'

'It was called "Les Marionettes de l'Amour,"' said the marquis, looking curiously at his friend.

'Ah yes, so it was! Well, the truth is—I am afraid you will think me very foolish?'

'I never thought you very wise, dear boy!'

'But a year is a long time—one changes, you know; the fact is, I want you to let me have it back.'

The marquis uncrossed his legs, put down his coffee, and appeared to reflect.

‘You have forgotten the circumstances under which you gave it to me,’ he said at length.

Decidedly the first note of danger was sounded by the marquis—*You have forgotten* instead of *Do you remember?*

He took a key from his watch-chain, shook his head, selected another, and opened a Venetian cabinet that stood against the wall. A sliding panel in one corner gave way at his touch, disclosing a secret drawer, which was empty, except for a sheet of note-paper folded in two. He held it up to the light. It was in Lucien’s handwriting, and ran as follows:

‘I, the undersigned, Lucien Sylvestre, hereby deliver into the hands of my friend, the marquis de Morfontaine, the manuscript of a poem by myself, entitled “*Les Marionnettes de l’Amour*,” to be by him retained for a period of seven years from this day, the 27th May, 1831, unless he should see fit to ordain otherwise. I declare that this is my will and pleasure.’

The document was duly signed, sealed, and witnessed by the butler and the wonderful cook.

The marquis put it back again, and immediately locked the cabinet. The author laughed.

‘You were right at the time. I am very grateful to you,’ he said. ‘You told me that the thing was crude. I am sure it was so. I am far better able to correct it now than I should have been eleven months ago. I have thought of several changes that would materially assist the development of the idea. You said yourself that it needed great alteration before it could be fit for the public.’

‘For the public? no,’ said the marquis, who had the weakness of caring very little about anything for which

he thought more than a dozen people cared much. 'Any publisher would accept it just as it is. It would make a stir, that I do not deny, and in a year from the date of publication every line of it would have perished.'

The voice of Blum began to be heard again; the marquis was an *aristo*, a despised of the people. To Blum the people were everything.

'Surely the verdict of one's fellow-creatures must count for something?'

'The verdict of one's fellows—certainly. It was in order that this might be favourable, that I asked you to let me have the manuscript. At present your fellows would say that the poem lacks one thing, the touch that only experience could give.'

'I have had any amount of experience since then,' said Lucien eagerly. 'I am most anxious to point out to you the improvements that I desire to effect. I feel quite sure that you will agree with me. Give me the manuscript!'

'I might have given you back the manuscript of my own accord,' said the marquis, 'if you had come here oblivious of the very name of Lucien Sylvestre, and of everything else, for that matter: raving about some impossible woman as if she were all the goddesses rolled into one—unable to eat your dinner—hopelessly down at heel—as happy as a beggar one moment—as miserable as a king the next. Then I should have known that it was in your power to correct.'

'Nonsense!' said Lucien with some irritation. 'Any Tom, Dick or Harry may fall in love and make an ass of himself; he will not be able to write poetry because he is unfit for rational employment. Experience has

nothing to do with it; of that I am convinced. What is imagination worth, if it cannot even supply the miserable facts of the most humdrum existence? I tell you plainly that I hate women. I shall never care for one in my life. My very conception of love—of beauty—of the ideal woman—renders it quite impossible. If you meant to wait until I was caught in the toils of a vulgar passion, you should have made me lend you the manuscript for seventy years, not for seven. Only incipient dotage could bring me to such a pass.'

The marquis smiled.

'Wait until the seven years have run out!'

'I tell you I cannot wait,' rejoined Lucien, his anger rising. 'It is all very well—you are a rich man, you can afford these caprices. I have known what it is to dine off dry bread.'

'Good heavens!' said the marquis very calmly. 'Have you been compelled to throw up your situation?'

Lucien moved impatiently on his chair.

'I will not say that. Thanks to the secretaryship that you found for me, I have enough to eat and drink for the present. How long will it last? Who can say? I am unable to face the thought of complete destitution. If the "Marionettes" did nothing more, they would bring me in a certain sum of ready money. Once again I implore you to let me have the manuscript.'

The marquis took up his cheque-book, which was lying open on the table, wrote his name at the bottom of a cheque, and handed it to Lucien; it was blank.

'Fill that up for any sum that you require,' said he, 'and let us talk about something else.'

Lucien tore it in pieces.

‘There is one thing I hate more than destitution—that is dependence.’

‘You need fear neither unless you behave like a fool. There is no likelihood that the secretaryship will come to an end at present; but if it did, why should you refuse to accept money from me? It is only interest upon a loan. Perhaps you will say that the loan is not worth much, financially speaking—that you could not under the most favourable circumstances make more than four hundred francs by your poem (that is more than three times as much as the English Milton got for the copyright of “Paradise Lost”). Look upon it as an investment in fame, not in funds, and the justice of the thing grows plain. How long is it, dear fellow, since you became so anxious as to pounds, shillings and pence? It was with great difficulty, I remember, that I persuaded you to give up living on nothing at all.’

‘I am not in the least anxious. That is just what I wanted to say. You are quite right. You know as well as I do that I care nothing about money. It was a mere excuse. I have everything, more than everything that I want. I did not like to say it—it seemed conceited—but now that you have spoken the word yourself, I do not care. I do believe, sir, that poem would bring me fame.’

‘It cannot fail to do so, if you wait until the time has come for you to make it perfect.’

‘How dare I wait?’ said Lucien. ‘You know how uncertain life is.’

‘Few of my people have died before seventy. But I have provided for the contingency of my death; I

have left minute directions in my will. My next of kin will have no difficulty in finding the manuscript at the appointed time.'

'I never meant that,' said Lucien, somewhat taken aback. 'Of course you will not die. How could you? I meant that I might die, and then there it would be—unfinished—a mere fragment, so to speak.'

'Have you any reason to feel uneasy about your health?'

'Well, I had a cough last December,' said Lucien, who had not once recollected this fact in the meantime. 'It might come back any day. It might mean consumption; then where should I be?'

'Where you are now as regards the main point. Your work is as good as it can be *quâ* work; it is rare Venice glass with no wine in it. If you live, you will pour the wine in by-and-by, and all the good company in the world will come and drink. If anything should happen to you, my dear boy—which the gods forefend!—the Venice glass remains intact; it is neither better nor worse. Those who have the misfortune to survive you will say: "Corneille, had he died at that age, would not have left more."'

'All very fine!' said Lucien. 'The sun may shine and we be cold.'

He was not really thinking of what he said; some indefinite suggestion or half-suggestion of Blum's, recalled, he knew not how, during the past few moments, haunted his brain. What if the manuscript should be lost? What if de Civrac not only would not but could not produce it? Did he only imagine that of old it had lain in the same drawer with the document of his signing? What was all this about 'no difficulty in finding it'? What if——

‘I do not think you will feel cold,’ said the marquis; ‘you will find yourself too much in the sun, perhaps. If you are mortally stricken, you conceal it very well. What are all these megrims? Have you had a pre-sentiment?’

Lucien could not say that he had.

‘You are very hungry for praise on a sudden,’ continued the marquis. ‘I will do you the justice to say that I think, in the depths of your heart, you care for it not much more than you care for money. I have seen you turn sick at a large dose before now.’

There is no flattery so delicate as that conveyed in the implication that a man is altogether above it; yet Lucien, who, if the truth must be told, was extremely sensitive as to praise or blame, heard this remark with only one ear. What was it but an attempt to change the conversation—to divert it from the main point at issue?

‘We have beaten about the bush long enough,’ he said. ‘Can you not see that I am in earnest? I want my manuscript again.’

‘You have given me no sufficient motive for restoring it to you. Do this—and I will place it in your hands at once.’

‘I cannot explain my motive.’

For the first time that evening Lucien enjoyed the luxury of speaking the truth. It is strange that anger will enable a man to do this at the last moment, when, by a series of subterfuges, he has all but put it out of his own power.

‘I thought as much,’ said the marquis. ‘Then your motive is bad, and I shall not accede to your request.’

‘What!’ cried Lucien hotly. ‘You refuse to give me back what is my own?’

‘I do indeed—in your own interest.’

‘Do you mean that seriously?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you mean that you will not?’

‘I will not.’

‘You cannot,’ said Lucien suddenly; ‘you have lost the manuscript.’

The next moment he would have given every prospect of money or of fame to recall the words.

CHAPTER II

THE POET FINDS HIS OWN

‘SINCE that is your belief,’ said the marquis in the tone of a polite stranger, ‘I will restore the manuscript to you instantly. May I ask you to come upstairs with me?’

It was not in the room, then. Lucien’s desire to see it vanished; he had been driven mad by two opposite convictions: one that his manuscript was lying there ready to hand, yet invisible; the other that it was not in the house at all. Now he became conscious that he had raised a storm about nothing. Nevertheless he followed in silence. What else was there to do? At the head of the staircase, however, he appealed for mercy.

‘Sir!’

The marquis turned.

‘I do not want to see; it was nonsense.’

The marquis shrugged his shoulders and went on.

‘I am not going one step further,’ said Lucien.

‘You will kindly accompany me.’

Again Lucien followed like a cowed schoolboy.

Who was it that had whispered strange suspicions in his ear?

The upper part of the house was unknown to him. If that portion which everyone might see was famous among those who knew for its treasures, what might

not be expected where the fastidious eye of the master alone surveyed them? He felt as though he had pried into his friend's secrets, and were trespassing where he had no right to go. Who could have imagined that there were so many stairs in the *château*?

At the end of a long passage de Civrac opened a door. The room into which Lucien followed him was small and low in the roof. A hanging of coarse serge divided them from the recess, which presumably held the bed. Another hanging covered the window. No carpet hid the bare boards. Instead of cushioned chairs and couches, behold a high seat before a tall wooden desk, like that which clerks use; on it a toad-stool inkpot of common glass, a long goose-quill, standing in a tumbler of water, a sand-box, three or four sheets of blue paper, and a hare's foot. There was an odd smell, as if someone had just blown out a candle. The marquis set down the light he carried upon the desk. On a plain chest of drawers close to the recess lay a box of carved ivory—the only thing of value there—and another box of plain deal.

'Take what is your own,' said de Civrac, as he placed the ivory box in Lucien's hands. 'Here is the key. Unlock it!'

His tone grew more peremptory as Lucien stood undecided.

'I will not,' said Lucien.

'You do not know how, perhaps? Allow me.'

He took the box from Lucien and put it on the chest of drawers. The key turned in the lock, but when he tried to raise the lid, it stuck fast.

'What! Have I forgotten the way myself?' he said impatiently. 'I was sure it went to the left.'

This time he turned the key in the opposite direction. He raised the lid. The casket was empty.

‘Heaven be praised!’ thought Lucien.

‘The devil!’ said the marquis. He was silent for an instant.

‘Look! look!’ he exclaimed.

Lucien’s eyes wandered vaguely round the room. There was nowhere to look. Everything lay naked and bare. The manuscript was not likely to conceal itself in a tumbler of water nor about the legs of a desk.

Stay! What was that? The pointed toe of a little moss-green velvet slipper under the window-curtain.

‘*Cherchez!*’ repeated the marquis.

‘*Cherchez la femme!*’ cried a voice from behind.

A small white hand, holding a bundle of manuscript, was thrust forth. The fingers were unusually long and slender. A ring containing a single emerald twinkled and shone upon the third.

Never before had Lucien noticed the beauty of a hand.

‘Perfect!’ he said to himself.

Was he interested? Was he annoyed? It was like a woman’s vexatious ways to find a thing that a man was only too glad to have lost. Certainly she had exquisite hands.

The marquis leant across the desk and smiled. Nevertheless, he gave a long sigh, like one who is much relieved. He made no attempt to divide the curtains, which were jealously held together at the back.

‘You showed me everything else that was in the house,’ continued the voice, half plaintive, half, as it were, accusing. ‘You never showed me that box. You never told me what was in it.’

The marquis said nothing.

‘You left your watch and seals upon the table when you went out riding this afternoon.’

The marquis made no observation, but his face grew stern.

‘You may have it back again. It is enormously dull, and it is long—as long as your face.’

‘Return it to the author at once,’ said the marquis, ‘and apologize to him for your behaviour.’

‘Ah, it is not yours, then!’ she cried. ‘How glad I am! I thought you never could have written it.’

‘There, for once, you thought rightly.’ He turned to Lucien. ‘Take what is your own,’ he said.

‘Oh, do take it!’ cried the plaintive voice. ‘It is so heavy!’

The manuscript fell with a thud on the floor, all Lucien’s hopes of literary distinction falling with it. The little white hand was withdrawn.

‘You have not done as I told you,’ said the marquis. ‘I should wish you to apologize to this gentleman.’

‘Pray—pray!’ interrupted Lucien.

‘I apologize to this gentleman,’ said the voice, without the slightest change of tone. ‘Swear, sir, that you have never seen me.’

‘I swear,’ said Lucien. ‘The oath is easy enough, Mademoiselle, as I have not yet had that honour.’

‘Good-night!’ said the marquis pointedly to the curtain.

‘Good-night!’ said the curtain pointedly to the marquis.

‘Good-night!’ said Lucien.

He had not the least idea what to do. One convic-

tion, and one alone, he held—that nothing on earth would induce him to pick up the manuscript.

After a moment's delay the marquis picked it up himself, and they left the room together.

'I must be going,' Lucien said desperately.

He could not stay another instant in the place where he had made such a fool of himself.

'Going! At this time of night? Impossible. You can have your coffee as early as you like in your own room to-morrow.'

'No. I must go at once. I have private business. I must return.'

'The *diligence* is a child of light. You do not propose to walk the whole way back to Lyons, I imagine?'

'I am going to see a friend on the road.'

'You will find the entire household in bed.'

'I am not going there immediately. It is a beautiful night. I want to look at the moon.'

'Permit me to observe that there is no moon to-night,' said the marquis, glancing out of the window.

The clouds had gathered indeed since Lucien's arrival, and everything lay black beyond that ghostly corridor through the unshuttered window wherein he saw himself, his former friend, and the candle, reflected. To be out in a fearful storm, to be killed by lightning—the thought attracted him savagely.

'It is imperative that I should leave this house,' he said, in a tone that he himself admired, and he wondered why he had not said it before.

The marquis attempted no further resistance.

'If you must go, you must,' he said. 'Only, remember, if it should rain, if you should feel it inconvenient to be out, we never fasten the back-door. You

would find your room ready. I will have your luggage sent after you in the morning—and this. You were wise to claim the custody of it. With all my care, I could not keep it safely.'

A vision of his manuscript arriving by post, as if it had been rejected by an editor, made Lucien feel that he could no longer endure life.

'You are very kind, but I can take it with me. I had rather take it. Good-bye.'

'A prosperous journey to you!' said the marquis, and closed the door.

Lucien stood alone upon the steps. For the first time since he had come he breathed freely, but the touch of the paper burnt his fingers. What was to be done with it? That was the first consideration.

He hated the poor dumb thing as if it were a person that had injured him. Why was there no fire anywhere, so that it might be consumed at once and for ever? Why was there no water within reach? It is wonderful how the elements desert a man at his need.

This wretched heap of paper—a thing that even a girl could not read with patience—had this made him the laughing-stock of a chit with a little white hand, and cost him the friendship of the best man he knew? He longed to tear it into a thousand pieces. Then he saw the marquis, as he had seen the marquis long ago, when, in the days of their first acquaintance, he tore up a letter and threw it out of window, and his host prodded with a cane one of the fragments upon the gravel path, with an expression of disgust which said plainly, 'What low, ill-bred fellow has done this?' No, it could not be torn in pieces within miles of the *château*.

He had seated himself on a bench below a great sycamore that shaded one corner of the lawn. The green carpet beneath his feet, the leafy roof over him—these were as much the marquis's property as the house. Still, he could breathe here. After all, the marquis had not paid the sun to shine on them nor the wind to blow.

Presently the moon shone out again. There might be some comfort in that, because the marquis had said there was no moon. And, having lightly touched her wound with this balm, Vanity, that had been up in arms, fell prostrate without a word. She could not stand the moon; she was dead.

'Why,' said Lucien, 'if I never wrote another line, what would it matter?'

All at once there was a thin, scarcely audible sound as of fine rain. He looked up in surprise, for the sky was clear, and no drops fell on his hand. Was it raining only upon the gravel path?

Above a row of white tulips at an upper window a little white hand waved a watering-pot to and fro. The room behind was dark, and before he had time to do more than note the glimmer of the ring it had vanished. The drip of the shower on the gravel continued for some minutes, and then ceased. The window was shut.

His dream of peaceful indifference broke with the first vision of that hand; try as he might, he could not dream it on. The nightmare of the manuscript began again instead.

'If only this were a hollow tree!' he said, putting out his hand to feel the bark. 'There are no hollow trees, except in books.'

The little action roused him. He stood up. There was nothing now between him and the beauty of the night. He was young—and in youth solitude goes to the head like wine. Undisturbed by the reflection that, on the other side of the globe, half a world was awake and stirring, he laughed for joy to find himself the only live thing in this universe of flat, corpse-like sleepers.

‘By-and-by, in a year’s time, I shall laugh at it all.’

He was beginning to know this about himself—that, however strong his emotions might be, they seldom lasted. But again he heard the mocking voice, and it mocked louder than his mockery.

As he dragged out hour after hour under the tree, between sleeping and waking, he wondered whether he had been taught in school that the night of April 29 is the longest night in the year.

The day dawned grim and gray at last, and he took the road towards Lyons.

CHAPTER III

THE SINGING OF A SONG

‘Do you think he will come to-night?’ said Mademoiselle Jeanne.

She was on friendly terms with Charles Blum, because she wished to be on friendly terms with his friend Lucien Sylvestre. From her window on the floor below the garret in which Blum lived, she had often watched the two men as they walked back arm-in-arm; at least, she had seen two men coming, and had watched one.

‘He must be a poet,’ she said to herself. ‘It is in his eyes; it is in his hair.’

She would not read a line of poetry if she could help it; but she cherished a profound respect for poets, in spite of the fact that she never wished for anything that was impossible. Her least desire, even in its beginning, was half a plan; not altogether so, for she would have liked best to become acquainted with Lucien by chance, had not experience convinced her that chance, unless assisted, takes a long time about the business. She hardly confessed to herself, in spite of her unconscious plotting, that she did care to know Lucien. Blum was a practical man; it would be useful to know Blum, she said.

To this end she dropped her umbrella downstairs one day on purpose that Blum should pick it up. It did not occur to him to do so; he was not a gentleman

by birth, and he was standing at the bottom of the flight. Mademoiselle Jeanne had to toil back herself.

‘The other would have picked it up in a moment.’

A day or two afterwards she discovered that there was a draught in her room under the door. She consulted Blum; he, being a practical man, was interested, and came in, without asking leave, to see how things were.

‘The other would have asked my permission.’

Blum cautioned her against buying felt in the street,—which gave annoyance, because she was practical herself, and had not meant to do so. He advised her as to the shop where she would get it good and cheap, and he profited by the chance to read her a long lecture on the rights of shopkeepers, on the state of industrial affairs in Lyons, on the desirability of a fixed tariff. She listened with submission, and, as she was forced to interrupt him in the middle that she might take back some embroidery, she invited him to resume it the next evening over a cup of tea—English tea which had been sent to her from London by her godmother. She acquired the habit of drinking it in that country, she said.

‘Mamma was English.’

She spoke softly, and to Blum the fact accounted for anything that might have seemed odd in her conduct.

‘Do you think he will come to-night?’ said Jeanne, once more; for Blum was not always clever at hearing what she said.

‘I suppose so.’

Jeanne supposed so, too; she wished that he would come. She had lighted a fire, although it made the room too hot, and she could ill afford the money to

pay for coal, because she felt, vaguely, yet with a certain strength, that if she made this sacrifice, Fate might not prove unkind. She was burning, in pure wantonness, fuel that would have kept her warm during the frozen nights of winter—when there was a stove in the room, too! Blum thought her an extravagant young woman.

‘Do you know where he was last night?’

‘In his own room, I should think,’ said Blum.

‘Indeed he was not; he never came in at all.’

‘Perhaps he went to the country to see that marquis of his; he sometimes does.’

‘He has not gone for a very long time.’

‘Then perhaps he did not,’ said Blum.

‘I thought there might have been a quarrel.’

Blum shook his head gloomily.

‘No such luck.’

‘Why, you do not want him to fall out with his friend, do you?’

‘I would give a year’s salary that he should.’

Jeanne sat silent. To her mind a marquis should be fit company for a poet; she liked to fancy the beautiful *château*, the wide, moonlit gardens. A lovely daughter or sister, of course, the marquis had; it was not so pleasant to think of her. Still, instinctively Jeanne took sides with the *château* from the beginning.

‘Do you know the marquis?’ she asked.

‘Heaven preserve me from that honour!’ said Blum, shrugging his shoulders.

‘Why do you hate him so? It seems unfair.’

‘I have no patience with people like that,’ said Blum, kicking the fender.

‘Like what? Like the fender?’

‘You do not know them. It is fortunate for you that you never will.’

‘I thought he owed everything to his friend the marquis,’ said Jeanne.

‘So he does, and a false sentiment of gratitude makes him submit to restrictions that a man of his age ought to be ashamed of. What business has a marquis to interfere with the free development of his intellect? Why, he has actually got possession of the manuscript of a poem of Lucien’s, and exacted a promise from the boy not to publish it for seven years.’

‘Why?’

‘Oh, some rubbish or other! He had never been in love, and therefore he could not describe it.’

‘You think that people could describe love who never felt it?’

‘I think that he wants to keep Lucien dependent, and therefore deprives him of the means of making an honest livelihood. Or else he is jealous. He writes himself, I believe. I told Lucien that I should get the manuscript back again, if I were he.’

‘Are you sure that it would be successful? Have you ever read it?’

‘No,’ said Blum. ‘But you have only to look at Lucien to see what he was meant for. A social reformer of the first rank! Why should he waste seven of the best years of his life? Humanity wants him; I want him. Even now he acknowledges the justice of my view of life—the only sensible view. He feels the greatness of it. He is with me in every attempt to ameliorate the condition of the people. But he will not consecrate his talent to the cause. He would

rather rhyme *dove* and *love* forsooth; only the marquis says he cannot.'

'Is the marquis right? Has he ever cared for any woman?' asked Jeanne.

Blum stared at her.

'Never. Why should he?'

'People sometimes do, you know. What a noise there is outside in the street!'

'Oh, it is nothing!' said Blum. His face darkened. 'Another crier arrested, perhaps. Sit still; you cannot prevent it.'

'I must see,' she said, rising and drawing up the blind so quickly that she almost broke the string. 'I thought I heard a voice that I knew.'

'Did you?'

He rose and went to her side. She threw open the window. The street was full of people all walking or running one way, hurrying to join a knot at the farther end. Exclamations and oaths made the air noisy. Jeanne felt as if she were breathing it in. Above them rose a clear, fresh young voice, singing a broad, popular tune. They could not distinguish the words.

'He is on the steps of the Fountain. Who can it be? It is——' said Jeanne, and hesitated.

'Upon my soul, you are right! What is he doing there at this time of night? He will be arrested to a dead certainty.'

'Cannot you stop him?'

Blum did not see how pale Jeanne had become.

'The police! I knew it!' he said.

A body of *gendarmes* had turned the corner, and was marching along the pavement. The regular tramp of their feet sounded curiously different from the con-

fused rush hither and thither of scattered units of the mob.

‘Police! police!’ shouted Blum, thrusting his head as far out of the window as he could.

The cries were hushed, the Song ceased in an instant. The singer sprang from the steps of the Fountain, and disappeared among those who had been listening to him. They melted away down one street and another. By the time the police reached their destination, not a man was left. Blum closed the window, threw himself back in his chair, and laughed till he could laugh no more.

‘But is he safe now?’ said Jeanne.

‘Safe?’ echoed Blum. ‘Yes, as safe as if the police had him. He is safe from the marquis at last. He is mine.’

CHAPTER IV

FIRE BURNS

'I WISH we knew for certain that they had not taken him,' said Jeanne. 'I cannot understand. What was he singing? How could the police get wind of it so soon?'

'They sleep with one eye open. As for what he sang, it will be high treason soon to him

"Savez-vous planter des choux?"

outside the walls of your own house. The Government is not musical.'

'Hark! there is someone singing now. Oh, I wish they would stop! It is the same tune. It is coming down the street. Listen! listen!'

More and more clearly came the sound.

'Is the fellow mad?' said Blum quietly.

It ceased for a moment at the entrance—was taken up again on the stairs. Blum opened the door. Lucien dashed up, two steps at a time, shouting at the top of his voice.

'Be quiet!' Blum said with a smile, as he seized him by the arm and dragged him in. 'Do you want to sing us off to the galleys? Have some respect for our hostess's liberty, if you have none for mine!'

'Your pardon, Mademoiselle Jeanne!' said Lucien, with a charming bow. His eyes sparkled.

'Sit down and rest,' she cried eagerly, pulling forward the best chair in her room. 'You must be tired. Let me give you a cup of tea.'

He thanked her, and drank it in silence. The bright eyes seemed to Jeanne to be looking at things she could not see.

'A devilish good song it is, too!' said Blum. 'Who made it?'

'I did,' said Lucien. A flash of silent laughter lit up his face.

'You made it? When?'

'A quarter of an hour ago.'

'And you ventured to sing it in public before it was seven years old? What courage!'

Lucien nodded.

'The marquis will have something to say to that.'

'He will have nothing more to say to any poem of mine.'

Again the goblin gleam of mirth in the fixed eyes.

'That's well,' said Blum, laughing loudly and long.

'Hush!' said Jeanne, and put her hands to her ears.

Lucien looked up at her.

'I want to destroy something,' he said, as he drew a roll of manuscript from his pocket. 'May I contribute to your excellent fire? The night is cold. Have I your permission?'

'Hold hard!' cried Blum, 'what is it? I will answer for Mademoiselle Jeanne that she never consumes flesh and blood.'

'Monsieur Blum is right,' said Jeanne, smiling. 'It is too expensive.'

'Answer me one thing. Is that the "Marionettes"?''

‘It is.’

Blum placed himself before the fire.

‘So you have got it back from the marquis? Give it to me. I desire to read it. Mademoiselle Jeanne desires to read it also.’

But Lucien kept the roll in his hand.

‘It has been read—and damned. Nothing remains for it but eternal fire.’

‘What do you mean? The marquis himself——’

‘For a good Republican, my dear fellow, you are singularly fond of talking about the marquis. He had nothing to do with it.’

‘Who damned it, then?’

‘A lady.’

Blum drew a long breath, but Jeanne could hardly breathe at all.

‘May I inquire further?’

‘Oh yes!’ Lucien said, tossing his manuscript up to the ceiling and catching it adroitly. ‘You may inquire.’

‘Her name?’

‘I do not know it.’

‘Her age?’

‘I have not the least idea. It might be anything under twenty.’

‘Too young,’ said Blum, shaking his head. ‘Why have you such a respect for her opinion?’

‘I am certain that she is right.’

‘Your reason?’

‘You have read Pascal? The heart hath reasons—reason knows them not.’

‘Whew!’ said Blum. ‘You are in love with her, then?’

‘I never in my life before hated a woman.’

‘Ah!’ said Jeanne, with a little involuntary sigh that none of the three heard.

‘Nonsense!’ put in Blum energetically. ‘You have not shaken yourself free of that man to be in bondage to a woman—a woman—what do I say? A mere child!’

‘It is even so,’ said Lucien, crossing his short legs. ‘It came to pass because I followed your suggestion.’

‘A lucky thing that you asked for the manuscript!’ and ‘What a pity that you went!’ said Blum and Mademoiselle Jeanne in a breath.

‘I agree with you,’ said Lucien, including them in one magnificent salute.

Blum swore under his breath. A humming silence filled the room.

‘By the way,’ Lucien remarked suddenly, ‘you must not mention, either of you, that I have seen this lady. Your swearing reminded me, Blum. You must swear you will never say that I saw her.’

‘What is she like?’ asked Jeanne. The beating of her heart seemed to her to be louder than her voice; outwardly she was calm enough. ‘Would it not be as well for Monsieur Blum to know what sort of lady he is to swear you never saw?’

Lucien laughed low and sweetly.

‘Now that I come to think of it,’ said he, ‘I never did see her.’

‘He will not speak of it,’ thought Jeanne, tightening her clasped hands.

‘I have heard you talk nonsense often enough,’ put in Blum, ‘but this passes all. I suppose you invented the whole story? The lady never existed?’

'Oh yes, she does—she does exist!' cried Jeanne.

'What? Have you seen her?'

Lucien looked up in astonishment, and the manuscript fell from his hand.

'She is little,' said Jeanne. 'She has shining fair hair, gray eyes, a pale, delicate face, lovely white fingers.'

She had drawn a contrast to herself in this portrait, for she was tall and dark, and her eyes were brown.

'I cannot tell,' said Lucien, musing. 'Perhaps she is like that. Certainly she had white hands.'

Jeanne glanced at her own.

'I hate fair women,' continued Lucien. 'I made that Song because I detested her—because I hate all women—except yourself, Mademoiselle Jeanne—because I want to be free eternally. You would not like it. The people liked it, though. I shall write three plays next—or four—on Semiramis, Cleopatra, Fulvia—perhaps Jezebel.'

'Will you have time to do all that? You go so early to your work, and when you come back you look tired.'

'Oh, I shall have eternities of time! I have thrown up my situation.'

'Why?'

'The marquis recommended me. I cannot stand indebted to him for my wages.'

'Better and better,' said Blum, rubbing his hands. 'We will have you on the staff of the *Glaneuse*. I know the editor; he is a sensible man. Have you anything that we can take to him to-morrow?'

'No; but I will write something to-night—now—this moment. Give me a book to cut, slash, hack about, hew in pieces. You must have plenty; you are

always reading. I want a popular idol to destroy. What is that sticking out of your pocket?’

‘“Marion de Lorme,” by Victor Hugo. Here it is, at your service.’

‘I thought that you were an admirer of Hugo,’ Jeanne said to Blum, surprised.

‘They say he is good.’

‘He will not exist to-morrow,’ said Lucien grimly.

‘Good-night! Good-night, Mademoiselle.’

He picked up his manuscript and flung it into the fire.

‘No, no!’ cried Jeanne, springing forward as she would have sprung to save a child, her eyes full of horror.

Lucien seized her hands, held them fast as the ‘Marionettes’ roared in flames up the chimney, kissed as he released them, pounced on the slim paper volume that Blum was holding, and rushed from the room.

Jeanne’s first thought was for the manuscript, but that was past help, and she soon came to the conclusion that it is not the part of a wise woman to cry over burnt paper. She did not quite know whether she was happy or unhappy, nor did she feel inclined to sink away from sweet companionable life into the loneliness of sleep. For a long while she sat without motion, her busy fingers in her lap—a strange attitude for her; for when she was not eating nor sleeping she was always at work. At last she turned to the street to satisfy herself that the steady standing houses looked the same as on the night before. Her room afforded a view of three windows on the opposite side. In the centre window she often saw a baby, who was left there

hour after hour sitting in a high chair. She was teaching it to kiss its hand to her, but the baby did not yet understand. By this time, of course, it would be in bed. She wished that she could have seen it.

The window to the left was hung with white curtains, a frame without a picture. In the window on the other side, which was a little lower down, and much less wide, a shoemaker sat at work—always at work—from dawn. When it grew dark he lighted a little lamp and worked still. Mademoiselle Jeanne never sat up late enough to see him put it out; she watched in vain to see him lift his eyes once from his task. To-night as usual the lamp showed her his sallow countenance in strong relief, his hard, rough fingers.

‘I wish,’ she said, looking down at her own—‘I wish I had little white hands.’

CHAPTER V

CORNEILLE'S DEFENDER

'TAKE me to your editor at once,' Lucien said to Blum the next day. 'I have written two articles, one last night, the other this morning. I have never written anything half so good.'

He had slept late after hours of toil, and gone to work again feverishly when he rose. It was now close upon dusk.

'Let us go,' said Blum. 'The last news will be coming in. We shall be sure to find him. Did you read "Marion de Lorme"?''

Lucien nodded several times, but made no remark.

There seemed to be nothing in the office of the *Glaneuse*, when they reached it, except a green baize table in one corner. The ceaseless scratch of a pen, however, bore witness that someone must be writing there, dark as it was.

'Produce your editor!' said Lucien. 'Where is he?'

'Not so very far off, gentlemen.'

A little featureless man, of the colour of dust, emerged from a recess.

'Your pardon,' said Lucien. 'I did not know you were in the room.'

'No offence.'

He begged them to be seated. The scratching pen scratched on.

'This is my friend, of whom I have often spoken to you,' said Blum. 'He is willing at last to devote his remarkable talents to the true cause. The energy of his vocabulary is astounding. You will find in him a magnificent contributor. He is, in his own line, unsurpassable.'

Lucien began to wish that Blum were in another world—or that he were.

'I have no doubt whatever of the truth of what you aver,' said the editor suavely. 'Your friend, of course, has written much? He has had great experience?'

'You have only to glance at his work to be convinced of it.'

'I had better tell you at once,' put in Lucien, 'that I have had no experience whatever.'

'You will make allowance for the modesty of my friend,' said Blum, shrugging his shoulders.

'You have not, I suppose,' said the editor, lowering his voice to a whisper, 'any news to tell me concerning the movements of a certain great lady in whom the public is now much interested?'

Lucien looked blank, and Blum kicked his foot on the floor.

'You have, if I mistake not, many friends among the aristocracy?'

'One friend I have—or had,' said Lucien. 'He has nothing to do with great ladies.'

'Ah! Very prudent. No one can be too cautious nowadays. Of course I quite understand. Since the failure of the rising at Marseilles it is, of course, needful to observe great reticence. No one can state any-

thing positively. It is impossible to do more than hint or guess at the truth. Nevertheless, any conjecture as to her whereabouts—you have not, for example, heard your noble friend mention a certain steamer, the *Carlo Alberto*?’

‘Never,’ said Lucien. ‘If you think that I can give you information as to the plots of the duchess of Berry, you were never in your life more mistaken. My friend may be a Republican, for all I know to the contrary.’

‘That is not probable,’ said the editor. ‘The natural prejudices of good birth are in favour of monarchy—mind, I do not say of a Bourbon monarchy. The Orleans family has deserved well at the hands of France.’

‘It is a matter of complete indifference to me,’ said Lucien.

There was a pause.

‘I have brought two articles with me. If you like to read them, you can judge for yourself as to my fitness to contribute to your paper.’

‘Thank-you,’ said the gentle editor. ‘Their titles are——?’

‘“On the Superiority of Monsieur Victor Hugo to Corneille;” and “On the Superiority of Monsieur Victor Hugo to every other Living Writer, whether of England, France, or Germany.”’

‘You are, then, an admirer of Victor Hugo?’ The editor’s voice became as honey.

‘No, sir, I am not an admirer of Victor Hugo—I am an adorer.’

‘A man’s adorers are not always the people to do him justice,’ said the editor, a touch of sourness flavouring the honey.

'It is enthusiasm—enthusiasm, sir, that must carry the day.'

'The readers of the *Glaneuse* are not, I fear, enthusiastic about poetry.'

'Then I will make them enthusiastic. I will show them the immortal glory of the man they despise.'

'Are you so sure, sir, that his glory is immortal?' said the man at the green baize table; and the scratching of the pen ceased for the first time.

'I am as certain of it as that I sit here in this chair, with my back to the light.'

'With your back to the light!' observed the other reflectively. 'Now, for my part I think that if there were only one single line of Corneille left, that one single line would be remembered when all the voluminous works of this young Hugo are forgotten.'

Lucien tore off the last blank page of his article, scribbled a few words, and handed it to the editor.

'I do not know your contributor's name. Will you kindly give him this from me, assuring him that I am ready to make good my words with sword or pistol, whichever he may choose. Blum here will be my second.'

'Permit me to observe,' said the person alluded to, 'that I cannot at this moment see well enough to read any communication, however important. The Jewish Rabbis cut twilight in half. The first half, they maintain, belongs to the day; they call it the twilight of the dove! The second belongs to the night—that is the twilight of the raven. The twilight of the raven draws on apace.'

Lucien scarcely listened. Since the evening before, Victor Hugo had become the only man alive to him—

all the rest were mere shadows: but at that moment a shadow with a loud voice burst noisily into the office, chanting the first lines of the Song for which Lucien had just escaped arrest.

‘Ever hear it before?’ he cried, seizing the little editor by the shoulders and dinning it into his ear.

‘Hear it before!’ said the editor testily. ‘I should think so. Why, I have heard nothing else all day. I could not eat my breakfast for it this morning. I was deafened with it at dinner-time. I do not suppose I shall get a wink of sleep for it to-night.’

‘It is the finest Song that ever was sung in Lyons. You have a finger in every pie. You know who wrote it, I suppose?’

‘Plague take the man, whoever he may be!’ said the editor.

‘They say he is—hush!—they say he is Victor Hugo.’

‘I do not think so,’ observed the man at the green baize table.

‘I am not at liberty to mention.’ The editor spoke like an editor, with dignity and reserve.

‘You can give me the last lines of the Song, at any rate. I do not mean to leave your office without them. The fellow I met could only recollect the beginning. Give me the last lines at once. I will not leave the room till I have got them.’

‘I am not at liberty to give them.’

‘But I am,’ said Lucien. ‘I happened to hear the Song last night. I can oblige the gentleman;’ and he trotted out the last stanza.

The young man waited not an instant. He darted from the office, shouting it as he ran. The tune was

taken up in chorus by a number of others outside, under the leadership of a handsome boy. The goblin look returned to Lucien's eyes as he sat in the twilight.

As the chorus crashed out the second time in full vigour, the editor turned to him.

'I see, sir,' said he, 'that I have the honour of speaking to a distinguished poet. May I say that I shall be happy to retain your services for my journal at a salary of——'

'You make a mistake, sir,' said Lucien brusquely. 'I am not the author of that Song. It is by a friend of mine.'

The editor's countenance fell.

'What the devil do you mean, Lucien?' cried Blum. 'My friend is modest,' he added, turning again in deprecation to the editor.

'Perhaps your friend is cautious,' said the man at the bureau. 'He cannot fail to know that the author of that Song will shortly be in prison.'

'I wrote the Song,' said Lucien. 'I do not care who knows that I wrote it. And I will write a hundred others like it—but not for your money.'

He rose and walked out.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

‘BUT how do you intend to live?’ said Blum, when he rejoined his friend a little later on.

Lucien was gazing in at the window of a fruit-shop. The rosy apples for eating, the crude green apples for cooking, the pippins, the amber and purple grapes heaped up in baskets, the figs, the early strawberries—these charmed his eye. Sprays of the rare white lilac blooming even now underground in the dark warmth of a cellar; tiny branches of lily of the valley were scattered here and there among them. Overhead hung a wreath of violets.

‘The golden violet!’ flashed through Lucien’s mind. ‘The golden violet that the poets won—the crowning prize, of three, at the Court of Love!’

In front, a row of tawny pineapples, crowned each with stiff gray leaves, lay prostrate—fallen monarchs—along the centre. The pale, thick yellow of the lemon relieved the splendour of a gorgeous heap of oranges. From the contemplation of all this gold Lucien turned reluctantly, as Blum repeated his question.

‘Let me see! I have got fifty francs somewhere in an old box—I know I have. My foster-mother left them to me to buy a mourning ring.’

‘Is that all?’

‘Oh dear no! The shoemaker opposite owes me

twenty. I can make him pay up at once—unless that baby of his is ill.’

‘Fifty and twenty makes seventy. Anything else?’

‘Certainly. I saw a ten-franc piece in my drawer when I opened it.’

‘Seventy and ten—eighty.’

Silence.

‘Besides,’ said Lucien, with brisk emphasis, ‘I must be able to raise sixty at least on my watch and chain. They are quite worth forty.’

‘Eighty and sixty—it makes a hundred and forty.’

‘Who said it did not? The Minister of Finance could not add up the figures more correctly.

‘You have saved nothing?’

‘I tell you I saved ten francs last week.’

‘Is there nothing to come to you from your relations?’

‘Not a farthing. I have no relations. I do not know who my father and mother were. My foster-mother left me a key which I wear round my neck, and two or three mysterious words. When I find the person who has the key to the words and the lock for the key, I shall be rich.’

‘That is all nonsense,’ said Blum decisively. ‘A hundred and forty francs! Well, with economy you can live two months upon that! What do you propose to do afterwards?’

‘Die, I suppose, if nothing better occurs to me.’

‘It is a pity that you have no convictions.’

‘Why?’

‘Because a man with convictions can always earn his living. If I could persuade you to listen to me for half an hour, you would be a convinced Republican, as I am.’

Lucien looked up at the clock.

‘I am all attention,’ said he. ‘We can go home by the Church of the Cordeliers.’

Blum asked no better. The great clock struck seven as he spoke.

Long afterwards Lucien remembered that walk. He started with a conscientious resolve to listen to every word Blum said, but, alas! he was not in the habit of listening to Blum; and listening is not an impulse! He heard the first few words—and fancy flew away with him.

It had been raining. Here, there, everywhere, lights were reflected in gutter and pool, as though someone were making golden flourishes with a great paint-brush in depths of still, brown water. These flourishes were brightest in the middle distance; they faded away before they reached his feet—they dwindled into darkness beyond. Gleams of thin faint green and red tinted the pavement alongside. The wheels of carts and carriages, as they went by, rolled upon half another wheel below the level of the water. The houses stood upon themselves upside down. From one of them rose the sound of Lucien’s Song, hammered out on an old piano. A waggoner shouted it as he went rattling by. A foot-passenger hummed it loudly all out of tune. A street boy warbled it in shrill falsetto. Behind—within—without these walls it was a thing alive; the air was full of it. Lucien drank the subtle sympathy of the townspeople as if he were drinking champagne. What did it matter to him that they murdered the music, that they mispronounced the words, that they did not know who he was? They had rescued him from the delirium of self-contempt

in which he rushed back to Lyons. Woman! What was a woman compared to these? If that woman could only know!

The clock of the Cordeliers struck eight.

What a thing is man, that he cannot choose to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely, yet cannot choose but hear one piece of metal clang on another! The booming bell made audible at last to Lucien the noise of words about his ear. Was that Blum's voice triumphantly asserting something about 'the duties of the true Republican—the restoration of the tariff in all its former purity by a section of the sub-committee of the Society of the Rights of Man?'

'Well,' Blum was saying, 'I am afraid that I have out-talked my time. You are a patient listener, I will say that for you. What do you think of it all? Are you convinced?'

He spoke like a man who could be answered only in one way.

'Why, no!' said Lucien. 'I cannot say that I am.'

Blum stared at him as if he were out of his senses.

'You have not even attempted to answer any one of my arguments.'

'Your arguments are unanswerable,' said Lucien. 'I have not a word to say against them. But since my early childhood, when my nurse used arguments to convince me that I ought not to eat the plums in the orchard, they have had no effect on me.'

Blum was silent, an occurrence so rare that Lucien looked at him and saw he had hurt his friend. In a moment his tone changed.

'What is this,' he said gravely, 'that it should come

between us? Why must I label myself with one name or another to earn a living? Why must I live at all, if it comes to that? What is life on the earth? I hate these words that are for time only. Bourbon—Orleans—the Republic—what does it matter who reigns? Who cares what form of government there was when Homer wrote? Who cares what the poor suffered then, or whether the laws helped them? All this belongs to time. I am an eternal spirit. I care for the things of eternity.'

'In the first place,' said Blum, recovering a little, 'the distinction between time and eternity is ridiculous.'

'Is it?'

'It is. Time is nothing but a succession of thoughts or events. Pray, what else is eternity? In the second place, literature will never flourish under a despot; and an unconstitutional King is a despot.'

'Was Louis Quatorze a constitutional King?' asked Lucien. 'It seems to me there was a poet or two about then.'

'In the third place,' Blum went on, not heeding the interruption, 'the better the man, the better the poet; and no true man neglects the practical side of life; his fellow-men may admire—they cannot respect him if he does. To be governed is the destiny of all; and the true man makes up his mind which way he wants to be governed. I would rather see you a follower of the silly romantic duchess of Berry, and her absurd baby, than the indifferent weathercock that you are now.'

'Is that so?' said Lucien. '*The silly romantic duchess of Berry!* I never gave her a thought before;

but now you speak of her like this, I begin to feel that I might easily espouse her cause.'

'You could not be such a fool.'

'Are you so sure? Any cause, you say, is better than none. I dare say it is. But I see no reason to take up one rather than another. For Heaven's sake do not begin again! We have heard arguments enough this evening. I will adopt a cause instantly. I will be quite impartial. I will make chance the arbiter. What is that?'

They were standing on the edge of a circle of light reflected from a cluster of lamps about the steps of an inn; a little shining patch of pale green pasteboard in the centre of one of the paving stones had caught his eye.

'It is a card. Somebody must have dropped it. How can you be so childish, Lucien? Have you no conception of the tremendous issues involved?'

'I have indeed,' said Lucien. 'I may think that they are infinitely little compared with those of art; I hold that they are far beyond the worldly calculations of reason. It matters very much what we do—nothing at all how we come to do it. If this card at our feet shows the Queen of Hearts on the other side, I live and die for the silly romantic duchess.'

He turned it over with his foot as he spoke.

'The Queen of Hearts!'

'Ah!' said Lucien. 'I am for the Bourbons then, *malgré moi*. Long life to the fifth Henry!'

CHAPTER VII

CONVICTIONS AND COMMISSIONS

It so happened that Jeanne was standing outside her door as the two young men went up.

‘Well,’ said she, ‘are you successful? Have you got work?’

‘No,’ said Lucien, ‘not exactly; but Blum thinks it as good as if I had. I have got convictions. I have taken up the cause of the duchess of Berry.’

‘Ah! what made you say that?’ cried Jeanne, clasping her hands. ‘A gentleman was here this evening. He knocked at my door by mistake. When he found that you were out, he left a message for you; but I was on no account to give it if you had found work on any of the Republican journals. I could not answer for you; I did not know.’

‘What was the message?’

‘The message was to Monsieur Sylvestre *alone*,’ she said, with more than needful emphasis.

‘Oh, Blum will say nothing!’ cried Lucien. ‘Upon your word and honour, Blum?’

‘Upon my word and honour.’

Jeanne’s heightened colour showed her annoyance, but she could not insist.

‘He gave me something that I was to deliver up to you. Come to my room for a moment.’

She did not ask Blum in, but he followed.

‘Here it is.’

She took from her cupboard a little oblong parcel, sealed with a plain seal, and fastened with a piece of green silk, and put it into Lucien's hands.

'The message is only a request to take this to colonel de Nacquart, who lives at the *château* de la Preuille, half a mile from the town of Montaign, on the road from Nantes to Bourbon-Vendée. It is an heirloom and very precious. It can be sent only by the hand of someone who is to be trusted. You must not travel by *diligence*; you must either ride or walk.'

'Upon my word, I am very much obliged to the gentleman. Who is he, I should like to know, that he expects me to ride or walk about the world, transacting his family affairs for him?'

'He knows who you are very well.'

'I have not the least recollection of him. What inconceivable impertinence!'

'He was not impertinent,' said Jeanne. 'It is I who cannot explain, because you are always talking. He did not wish you to do this for nothing. If you will undertake it, he will pay your expenses on the road—here is a purse—and you will receive a thousand francs when you arrive at la Preuille on the seventeenth of this month—the seventeenth, remember! He was very particular as to the date. He said, too, that he had need of a permanent agent. If you could carry out this business for him, and if you were willing to remain in his employment, he had no doubt that he should require your services afterwards—on the same conditions.'

Lucien stared at Charles Blum.

'I begin to think that you must be right,' he said,

laughing. 'No sooner have I adopted definite convictions than an offer of maintenance presents itself. What do you say, Blum—shall I accept?'

'Did the fellow leave his name and address?' asked Blum.

'Yes. He is called le sieur de Coquet; and a letter addressed "Care of Mademoiselle Marie-Louise du Guiny, 3, rue Haute-du-Château, Nantes," will always find him.'

'I have never heard of anyone of that name,' said Lucien, musing. 'I had better go and see him at once.'

'It would be useless. He quitted Lyons an hour ago. If you do not wish to oblige him, you have only to leave the packet here with me, directing a letter to him at Nantes, and he will send for it.'

'What is he like? Is he a gentleman?'

Jeanne hesitated perceptibly.

'Yes,' she said at last.

'Tall?'

'I cannot tell what he was like. I only saw him for a moment on the threshold of the door, and the lamp was not lit.'

'My advice to you,' said Blum, 'is to have nothing to do with the offer. I hate mystery.'

'And how do you propose that I should live, then?' said Lucien, who had become practical on a sudden.

'Not at your expense, I presume?'

'You would be sure to get work, sooner or later. As for this, you do not know what it is. For my part, I should be strongly inclined to open the packet and see.'

'Should you?' said Lucien, keeping his fingers

closed upon it. 'I have often been told that journalists are without a conscience.'

'You have only to return it, if you do not wish to go,' put in Jeanne.

'I am determined to go. My best thanks to you for delivering the message. I shall start to-morrow.'

'You do not mean this, Lucien?' said Blum, wrinkling his forehead into a frown.

'I do, most sincerely.'

Already Lucien heard the dance of the leaves in the fresh spring wind, and saw the meadows bright with buttercups.

A different vision was before the eyes of Jeanne. She saw the street below empty, the staircase empty, the room in which they stood, empty.

'I shall keep you informed of my movements,' said Lucien. 'If I am robbed, you can come and help me; if I am murdered, you will live to avenge me.'

'I hope that you will return as soon as possible,' said Blum. 'How can you form any settled opinions in that way? You are only following your whims like a girl.'

Lucien yawned.

'Well, good-night,' he said. 'I shall go to bed. Good-night and pleasant dreams, Mademoiselle Jeanne!'

But Jeanne had other occupation. She sat up late making a pink cotton dress to wear in the warmer weather, and as her fingers travelled forward over the stuff her thoughts travelled backward.

She was convinced that she had, that afternoon, seen the marquis. This it was that made her stumble and beat about the bush when she was asked to de-

scribe him. She could have done so well enough, but she feared that Lucien would never undertake the mission if he knew who had proposed it; and there was a strong, instinctive desire in her that he should. More and more she disliked the thought of Blum's mastery, feared his determination, distrusted his ideas of reform. Poor people had been miserable always; they were miserable in the days of Moses, she supposed. What was the use of trying to make them happier? She was poor herself; how would any change in the laws benefit her? There were worse things than poverty, after all. It might be well for Blum, who could not write poems and plays, to occupy himself with rates, taxes and tariffs; that was no work for 'the other.'

She had been struck with the voice and manner of the bearer of the little packet, and she smiled and shrugged her shoulders as she recalled Lucien's question, 'Is he a gentleman?' His brief yet not abrupt inquiry, his exactitude about trifles, and apparent carelessness as to whether Lucien accepted the commission or not, piqued her curiosity, made her anxious to see and hear more. One remark of his she had kept to herself.

'This affair has to do with a lady,' he had said, as he put the packet into her hands. 'The messenger himself must have no conception of it. I am sure that I may confide in your discretion.'

'What makes you think that you can trust me?'

'I have some experience of faces. Yours are not lips that tell tales.'

She gave no promise—he never asked for one—yet she felt that she had been honoured with a confidence

that nothing would induce her to betray. She envied the beautiful fair girl who had such a courtly protector. It appeared to her that the marquis was not a married man; he was the uncle of the fair girl most likely. She pleased and grieved herself with thinking that Lucien and this niece of his would meet—would plight their troth on the old battle-ground of la Vendée. She was one of those dangerous women who neither live in nor write romance, but spend their days creating it. If she, by word or deed or silence, could help Lucien to his castle and his lady—— But then her eyes filled with tears. He was going to-morrow, and she remembered that by one word she could have kept him.

Could she have kept him?

CHAPTER VIII

MARION'S LOVER

It was gusty spring weather when Lucien set forth on his travels. The hot sun flamed out at intervals, only to be fast obscured by thick masses of cloud, floated lightly across in a rollicking wind that shook the lilac blossoms down as soon as they opened, flung to and fro the golden hair of the laburnum, and covered the freshly-springing grass with hawthorn buds.

Moved by lover-like recollections of the conduct of the moon, he spent the first night and the second in the open air; but the weather became too cold, the rain fell in angry showers, and on the third day he was forced to think of taking shelter. He had walked for some miles without coming upon a house at all, when he beheld two, one on each side of the road, the Cigogne and the Duc de Bordeaux. As he was hesitating which to enter, his eye was caught by the words 'Marion de Lorme' written in large red letters upon the whitewashed walls of the Duc de Bordeaux.

'This is the inn for me,' he said to himself. '*Marion* against the world!' Nor had he any reason to repent his choice, for he slept in sheets perfumed with lavender.

He reckoned that it would take him about a fortnight to reach his destination, hiring a horse as often as he might, and walking when he could not get one.

After his long imprisonment in town, the freedom of open-air life enchanted him. His head was full of chiming words and fancies from the time he lifted it off his pillow to the time when he laid it down again.

Towards nightfall of the sixth afternoon he reached St. Gervais. Sure enough, there she was! The door of a stable belonging to an inn of the name of the Fleur-de-Lis was conspicuously adorned in red after the same fashion as that of the Duc de Bordeaux.

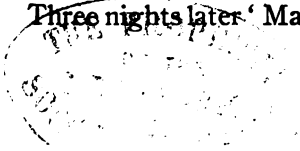
'*Marion* once more!' said Lucien. 'I have found her a good guide before now; I will try her again.' And he pulled the bell.

That evening, in the pauses of the rain, he heard the first nightingale sing from an elder-bush underneath his window.

He was beginning to wonder who the traveller could be that kept always three days ahead of him, liked the same inns, and cherished such an ardent admiration of the fair, frail lady at present occupying his thoughts to the exclusion—or so he fancied—of every other. When he reached La Souterraine, he looked about for the familiar sign. The name of 'Marion de Lorme' curled like a red ribbon round the old stone pillars of the porch of the Grande Duchesse. His bedroom window looked on an orchard white with blossom, through which a little stream ran golden in the red gold of the sun. Within there was a beautiful oak chest, finely carved with wreaths of laurel and a crown of bay.

A ladybird flew in and settled on his hand; he took it for a sign of good luck. They told him that Ron-sard had slept there once, and he dreamt of the Pléiade.

Three nights later 'Marion' deserted him. When he



arrived at St. Benoît she was nowhere to be found. In spite of many assurances to the contrary, he felt certain that he had missed his way, but it was too dark to go further, and he had to put up with such accommodation as he could get. No scent of lavender, no bird, no dream, no music! His room was stuffy, and smelt of boiled cabbage; a horse in a stable below rattled its chain so that he could not sleep for more than a few minutes together, and he woke in the worst possible humour.

The skies were heavy and overclouded, the road was dull for two days after that. He took no joy in anything on his way to Bressuire. As he walked up the main street, however, he heard a voice he knew singing the first verse of the Song that had set the city of Lyons on fire. His spirits revived instantly; he stood listening for a moment to make sure of the direction whence the sound came, and then entered a courtyard, which was empty except for two men, one of whom held a lantern while the other, whose oval face and irregular teeth he remembered in the editor's office the night before his departure, was writing something in large letters to the left of the door. He waited only to make sure that the first letter was M, strolled in, ordered his supper, took out 'Marion de Lorme,' which he had never looked at since he started, and began to read with the air of a student.

Presently the singer made his appearance, seated himself on the opposite side of the table, and drew from his pocket a volume in size, shape, and colour exactly like that which Lucien held. It seemed to open at the same page; without delay he also became absorbed in it.

A few minutes later the maid-servant entered, bearing a roast fowl, which she set between the two admirers of poetry. Having duly provided them with knives, forks, and napkins, she waited a little; then, as neither of them took any notice, she left the room, observing that she had plenty to do, and these gentlemen might eat their own food if they wanted it.

'I wonder if he heard?' thought Lucien, who had made no sign that he heard himself.

He was very hungry, but not for the gold of Cræsus would he have appeared to be less preoccupied than his neighbour. He stuffed his elbows on to his plate, and buried his head in his hands to exclude the delicious perfume.

'I wonder if he is going to finish the play before he begins! He must be in the fifth act now; but there are several pages to the end.'

The young man was clearly a swift reader. Read as hard as he would, Lucien could not keep pace with him. At length he turned the last page, noted something with a pencil at the foot of it, and looked up.

'There,' said he triumphantly, 'this is the twentieth time that I have read "*Marion de Lorme*," and I declare that it is the most magnificent piece in the world. But pray forgive me; do not let me interrupt you. I noticed that you were deep in the same work, and I felt that it was a bond of sympathy between us. You have not yet reached the conclusion; we will wait to attack this excellent chicken until you have done.'

'On no account,' said Lucien, with a smile, shutting up the book as he spoke; 'I am not so inured to woe as you. Possibly I should not be able to eat at all if I

went through to the end; I would rather leave off while I have still a good appetite.'

The young man laughed, and looked at him with sudden distrust.

'You are not an Alexandrian?' he said suspiciously.

'I do not know what you mean. I am very hungry. Is that Alexandrian?'

The young man burst into loud laughter.

'Your pardon,' he said, choking. 'What it is to live in the provinces—for a person of real intelligence, too, like you! Have you never heard of Alexander Dumas, author of "Antony"? There are those who say that he is greater than Hugo. Very great he is—not a doubt of it; but "Antony" to "Marion" is a candle to the sun; and I have not the least disposition to prejudice, but I could not sit down to table with anyone who preferred "Antony."'

'Then,' said Lucien, 'you are safe with me, for I have never even heard of "Antony." Besides, I agree with you, heart and soul: "Marion de Lorme" is the greatest play in the French language.'

The young man bowed.

'My name is René le Romain. May I assist you to a wing?' he said; 'or, perhaps, we had better divide the hecatomb at once. I believe I am very hungry; I was not conscious of it before. But I warn you that, when once I begin, my appetite is Gargantuan. I am delighted to meet you; I have not conversed with a sensible person for weeks. I am reduced to writing the name of my idol on the walls of every village in which I happen to pass the night. It is true I make a sacred duty of this. Who can tell? Here and there one may be able to read; here and there one may say to himself,

“ ‘Marion de Lorme’ ! Who is ‘Marion de Lorme’ ? ” and, when he has said it to himself half a dozen times, he may say it to some other, and that other may know. “ A bird of the air shall carry the voice. ” ”

‘ Have you seen Hugo himself ? ’ asked Lucien.

He said it shyly, as if he had dared to wonder if Le Romain were in love.

‘ What a strange question ! Why, I was one of the two that escorted him home to the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs every night when the dirty classicists threatened to kill him if he did not withdraw “ Hernani. ” A good way round it was to go, for we were living then in the Boulevard Montmartre. ’

‘ What is he like ? ’

‘ Magnificent ! The lion and the lamb. The grandest fellow in the world. A man to die for, and thank God that you had the chance of it. ’

‘ Ah ! ’ said Lucien.

‘ He is sorrowful enough just now, though. Nothing but stern necessity would have made me leave Paris. Poor Ernest de Saxe-Cobourg died of the cholera about a month ago. He worshipped the ground that Hugo treads on. He could not bear to feel that they had the river between them ; and when Hugo moved to the rue Jean-Goujon, de Saxe-Cobourg moved too. Well, there’s a darker river between them now. ’

‘ Victor Hugo mourned for him ! Who was this man ? ’

‘ A son of the duke of Cobourg. His beautiful Greek mother lived with him. The father made them some allowance, I believe. The boy shrank from making

acquaintances; but if he was shy and reserved out in the world, he made up for it among his boon companions. You should have heard him on the first night of "Hernani." Not Théo himself in his scarlet waistcoat roared louder than he did, and he went forty-four times.'

'I wonder why he cared about the world!' said Lucien, pursuing his own train of thought. 'What was it to him that his father would not, or could not, act a father's part? God made us; we are the sons of God.'

'You think so? For my own part, I acknowledge a prejudice in favour of having parents; but, then, I am old-fashioned, except in literature.'

'I wish I had known my mother,' Lucien said.

'It was his mother who killed that poor Ernest,' said René gravely. 'She would not do what the doctor ordered, because she thought it cruel. When all hope was over, she fell at Hugo's feet; she thought that he could give her back her child; she would not believe that she had lost him. Hugo spent the whole night sitting by the dead body, trying to calm her. They say she was frantic. Afterwards he nearly lost his own little boy; he cannot endure the sight of the black flag at the end of the street since. It is an ugly thing, cholera.'

'I would rather die of anything else. Why does he not leave Paris?'

'He cannot bear to be alone now when it grows dark; he needs his friends. His eyes are bad also; he has gazed too much on the setting sun.'

'Ah, well,' said Lucien, 'the man who wrote "Marion" might die to-morrow.'

'You would not say so if you saw him. It is impos-

sible to think of death at the same moment. Besides, he is bound to avenge "Marion." Think how the public treated her!'

'If I may ask the question,' Lucien said, 'why did you omit her name on the walls of St. Benoît?'

'The cooking was too bad,' said René; 'the wine was not worthy of her. As far as I am concerned, St. Benoît may go without the knowledge of her for ever.'

'But you have taken time by the forelock here; you did not wait to prove the cooking.'

'No; I must confess that I have an idle habit of sleep in the morning. I am an inveterate card-player. When I can find no one else to play with, I play cards with myself. Are you a friend of whist, by the way?'

'I have never touched a card in my life except once, and then with my foot.'

'Ah, that's a pity! Well, I am reduced to my own fellowship. I shall sit up till my candle is burnt out, and in the morning I shall wake only just in time to set forth. That is why I took care to insure "Marion's" place overnight; for I am running a race with Time, and I must be even with him the day after to-morrow.'

'You remind me of my own obligations. I, too, am bound to be at a certain *château* the day after to-morrow.'

The young man laid down his knife and fork.

'I thought so,' he said; 'I thought you were one of the true men.'

CHAPTER IX

THE PEASANT BOY IN THE FOREST

PERHAPS the look of surprise that followed his last remark chilled René, for he fell silent and betook himself to his cards. The uncomfortable sense of a pause, just when he was about to give or to receive fresh confidence, drove Lucien upstairs to bed.

'*One of the true men!*' What did it mean? An odd coincidence, he supposed—that was all. Some secret club for the worship of Hugo, about which René chose to weave an absurd mystery. It provoked him somewhat, and cooled his desire to make friends. He would start early, before René got up; it was better that they should not meet again.

Alas! the power of spirits to disturb each other is not limited by their bodily presence. He could not get rid of René, and solitude was no longer what it had been. René came between Lucien and the sky. His words were blown about in the wind. Sensitive as Lucien was to every shade of opinion, strong excitement, or the living calm of nature, would for the moment banish his consciousness of self, but it always returned.

One of the true men! What was a true man? A man with a name of some kind; that was certain. As a child Lucien had pondered much over his name. He would sit in the sun under the great sails of the wind-mill where he lived, thinking and wondering whether

it were for ever part of himself, whether it were, like that shadow of his on the ground, attached merely to outward form—a thing with which the soul of him had no connection. Into so deep a trance would he fall that he never heard the voices of the mill people calling. When he awoke he would clasp his hands together until they hurt, and cry, ‘I am still Lucien!’

Later on he recollected asking his foster-mother who bestowed that name on him.

She answered that it was St. Lucy, and told him how she loved St. Lucy more than other saints, though she loved them all. To this celestial friend she had prayed in her deep longing for a child. One wild December night—the last night of the year—she went to her door, and there he lay, a babe of but a few weeks old. The linen in which he was wrapped had no mark upon it, nor was there anything to show who he might be. Folded up in the robe was a canvas bag with a considerable sum of money in silver, round its neck a label, on which was printed in letters like those of a book, ‘*If he lives he must receive the education of a gentleman.*’ A few days after, a little silver key was dropped in at her window—by whom she did not know. She hung it round the neck of the child. To the name of Lucien she had added that of Sylvestre because St. Sylvestre is the patron of New Year’s Eve. All this happened, she told him, before her marriage with the worthy miller. She had not cared much for him, but she felt for his motherless child, and she feared St. Lucy, who had given her one for her own, might be vexed if she refused. Spite of her tenderness, however, the child died, and the miller seemed to bear the strange infant a grudge for it. He never

took to Lucien; the boy grew up between the sun and the wind, caressed and fondled by his nurse, frowned on and scolded by her husband.

When he was nine he was sent, by the advice of the priest, to the College of the Oratorians. He made no friends in this place, and if it had not been for the companionable thought of death, which sustained him with the strength of a passion, he might have gone mad there.

A beautiful girl in the village had died a month or two before he went away. His nurse told him about her—spoke of her heavenly face, of the blessed angels coming to take her soul. Ambition woke on the instant—deep ambition to die also, to see the white-winged birds of God, to be talked about by everyone in quiet, reverential tones.

As soon as he began to read of the deaths of heroes, they took the place of the saintly girl. He lay no longer on his little bed, surrounded by weeping and admiring friends; he perished in battle, he fell upon the scaffold. The image of glorious death fortified him to meet life's many terrors. Over and over again, when, after failure to learn his lessons, he was shut up for hours alone in a dark room, frightful to him because he could not conceive that it was empty, he kept himself sane by the resolute, detailed invention of some scene in which he himself played the part of Cinq-Mars or of another young, brilliant, and doomed conspirator. *Death is my helper; I do not fear shadows.* He followed in the steps of the Greek without knowing it.

All day he struggled over uncongenial tasks, or ceased to think of them, caught in the longing of homesickness, which made the sails of the mill go round in

his brain. Every night brought its own distinct horror. The black dormitory was full of murderous visions that he dared not look upon. Only the blanket—and his dream of death—lay between him and the wolves, the blood-stained daggers held by a severed hand in the air, the bat-like old women measuring drops of poison into a cup. Awful indeed is the war of a child with darkness, when imagination is at its height, and reason is scarcely born in him.

The Fathers—Father Dominic especially—were not unkind, though they were ignorant. If they had known the sick despair that closed round the heart of the boy as he saw, with prayers to saints and angels that it might last yet a moment longer, the last spark of the candle vanish, they might have allowed him a light; but the same fear which held him waking kept him dumb. Even now, as he harked back to this period, he could not recall it without a shudder.

‘Childhood a happy time! What do they mean who say so?’

He was beset by strange temptations to monstrous kinds of sin, half understood, and this persistently. The stories of the old chroniclers—notably Froissart—sometimes had power to deliver him out of his wretchedness, to make him forget; he was guilty of many derelictions from actual duty in consequence. The little contraband shop near by, where so many of his comrades would spend their substance on sweetmeats, did not tempt him. He bought these things now and again, that he might not appear unsociable, for, though he was not fond of other boys, he shrank from their dislike, and dreaded their laughter more than the Fathers’ disapproval.

Sometimes the blind ambition to be first would bring him to the front in a game of skill, in recitation, in the plays and charades which the pupils were permitted to act. In his own world he was first always.

Two starry moments shone out of the gloom—one when, in a little old brown leather diary, he chanced to come upon the lines:

‘ I saw her from my window, long ago,
Pass, like a princess, through the falling snow.’

He stole the diary (all the pages, except the first, were blank), and began to write verses himself. His own opinion of them was, that they were very fine; he never showed them to anyone, but they soothed him. The other flash of light gleamed from the eyes of the marquis who visited the school one day to see the child of a friend, and chanced to look at Lucien.

In his fifteenth year he fell ill and was sent home. ‘ He is an empty-headed boy; he has no inclination for knowledge.’ So the report ran.

The fresh sights and sounds of the country, the gentle care of his old nurse, revived him fast; but he had lived too long among abstractions, and they revenged themselves, as their way is. Every idea seemed to have left him. He would sit alone for hours, not even wondering how they passed. At the school, though he saw nothing with his outward eyes, the inward eyes, when they were not filled with nightmare, were for ever gazing on sunny meadows, on the armour of knights, on the blue and scarlet banners of strong armies; but now they rested also after their strained vision.

He was roused from this state of apathy by the death

of the miller. Feeling his last illness upon him, the old man related to his wife the occurrences of the New Year's Eve preceding that on which he married her. He had retained the words then spoken, and could vouch that his memory of them was accurate. No one had ever questioned him concerning his two mysterious guests, and he had never, till now, repeated them aloud; but the money that would be his in consequence of that knowledge still shone before his dying eyes, and he bequeathed them to his wife as part of her rightful property. It had not struck him to connect them with Lucien. She did so at once, and she impressed them on his memory, making him say them over and over again until she felt sure that he would not forget. In the dreary days after the miller's funeral she confided to Lucien her own fear of death.

'I cannot understand it, mother,' he said softly. 'It is better to be there than here. Look how beautiful it makes people, even when they were very ugly before! Besides, any of us may die any time. You will live longer than I shall—I am sure of that. But I am not afraid. Why should you be more afraid than I am?'

'Ah, Lucien!' she said, shaking her head, 'the young may die, but the old must. It is a very different matter.'

She died peacefully in her sleep a year or two later; and Lucien was left alone.

By the advice of the priest he went to Lyons, where the pittance he earned for copying manuscripts enabled him to live, if that be life which consists only in meat and drink.

Loneliness weighed him down like lead.

Weary at last of its own weary inaction, ambition stirred again—this time the ambition to be famous, in life, not only in death. It was roused by the sight of the name of the marquis de Civrac on some old title-deeds which he had to copy. If he could but make that man hear of him! Yet he took no further steps; and no one could have felt greater surprise than he did when he received an invitation to Morfontaine. His copying pleased the marquis, he was told.

Events followed each other swiftly after that. The marquis found him a post as secretary to one of the rich silk-merchants of Lyons, lent him the French classics to read, encouraged his first passion of imitation, praised, criticised. His fellow-lodger, Blum, also began to take a marketable interest in him, and Lucien fed on the praise of the man below, which was more intoxicating, though less nourishing, than that of the man above. Unlike the marquis, Blum did not criticise. Unlike that hateful girl, Mademoiselle Jeanne was dazzled.

He recollected strange words in the preface to 'Marion'—words which had arrested and charmed him before he entered upon the play itself—words to the effect that the conditions of the time were ripe—that now there would arise a dramatic author who should be to Shakespeare what Napoleon was to Alexander. He felt the strength of ten within him as he repeated them. Like wind from fields of ice came the voice of the marquis on that last evening at Morfontaine, *Take what is your own*, and the laughter from behind the curtain.

Lucien was one of those who remember not often but acutely. Recollection was to him all but experi-

ence repeated, and he would defend himself from it as from physical pain. If he once let go, everything else was, for the moment, annihilated.

Thus had he lost himself now.

The whirr of a bird's wing, as it flew past, woke him to the conviction that he had missed his way.

It was nearly dark.

There was no sign of any house or cottage near—the highroad had turned into a path—the path was turning into scrubby grass—forests of trees had marched up on either side, while he was at the mill—in the school dormitory—up in Blum's attic—far away at the *château*. He turned back.

A few steps onward the path divided into three, and the more he strove to feel certain as to the one by which he had come, the more impossible it grew to arrive at a decision.

'I do not see how I can have come by any,' he said to himself, with a desperate attempt at candour, 'or else I must have come by all.'

He dashed down each of the three in turn.

Not one of them had any definite intention of leading anywhere. They were mere sketches of paths, drawn here and there among the bushes, wandering now this way, now that, grass-grown, neglected of wayfarers.

He returned to the original spot where memory had given him a shake and flown away.

He stood still.

Stories recurred to his mind of riders in the Bush, who threw their reins on their horses' necks and were taken home in safety. Mentally he threw the reins on his own neck, so to speak. He shut his eyes, trying

not to think, but no spirit in his feet guided him in any direction. It was a disappointment, for he had lately asserted in argument with Blum, who maintained the contrary opinion, that there is something of the horse in every man—that this explains the ancient myth of the Centaur.

Finding less of the horse in himself than he expected, he resumed the man again, and sought his former friend, the moon.

He could see her, like a little boat set on end behind two bars of faint pink cloud. There lay the east, then; Montaigne lay to the west.

He walked boldly into the wood in the opposite direction. After all, what harm if he did spend the night in the open air? But his heart was beginning to fail. How if he missed his destination the following day? Fortunes might depend on it—the whole of his future life—undying fame. He had not given the end of the journey a serious thought before; now it assumed vast importance, and he cursed himself for a dreaming fool.

Farther and farther in he went, and the trees gathered more closely round him. Some of them entangled him in their hair, some of them caught him in their hands. He began to feel at last as if there must be a deliberate purpose in it, and half the beeches, birches, larches and young oak in France had entered into a conspiracy against Lucien Sylvestre. They opened out in front of him, they formed up in his rear. Their slender boughs waved and tossed softly in the cold night air—so many eloquent fingers to point him on—and then hung still and silent, or beat back on his face as he pushed his way through. He became furious

with all trees—enemies of man, of civilization, everyone of them—opposing a dumb, wooden resistance. There were women in them, he felt certain of that. The legends of Daphne and Phyllis were true. Nothing in vegetable nature could account for their stupid antagonism.

‘And you know I shall find my way in the end!’ he cried, apostrophizing a big and stubborn elm.

‘Yes, yes, I know it,’ said the elm, ‘but you have come a long way round. Hush!’

Lucien looked up in utter bewilderment. Was he taken at his word? Had these terrible trees not only got hair and hands like women, but the voices of women too? For it was a woman’s voice, he could have sworn to it—and a voice he had heard before. All at once an owl hooted.

No! he was wrong. He breathed again.

A peasant boy dropped from the boughs and took off his little woollen cap with a flourish; there was a tarnished gold button at the end of it.

‘Can I direct you, sir? Which way do you desire to go?’

‘To the town of Montaigu.’

‘Follow me, and I will put you on the right track.’

The slight figure glided on before him until it reached a clump of gorse, beyond which a low gate stood out white in the moon, a white-stemmed birch on either side.

‘Now, listen!’ the boy said, with the air of one accustomed to command attention. ‘Go through this gate, take the third turn to the left, and the fifth on the right, and keep straight ahead till you strike the

highroad. Then you are in the direct line for Montaignu. Oblige me by repeating what I have said to you. You have begun to lose yourself again already.'

Indeed, Lucien was busy observing what bright eyes the boy had in his long pale face.

'I go through the gate till I come to the highroad, and then take the first turn on the left?' he said doubtfully.

The boy whistled.

'I thought you had not heard a word I said. You are one of the people who do not know black from white! Never mind; we must think of some other way to guide you.'

He reflected.

'You understand that you are to go through the gate—not to sit on top of it, nor climb over, but to go through. You understand that?'

'Perfectly.'

'We must be thankful for small mercies! By-and-by you will come to an old quarry of red earth. You know a quarry when you see one? Good! Take the path that runs along the opposite side. That will lead you to a great rock—oh, but an enormous rock, the size of three or four! It throws a long black shadow. Take the path that cuts right across through the heart of the shadow, and keep to it till you come to the highroad. Once you are there, you can follow your own nose. Most men, however poetical they may be, are capable of that.'

'I am deeply beholden to you. The gate, the red quarry, the black shadow—I shall remember. You seem to be well acquainted with this forest?'

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

‘How did you know what I wanted to do? How did you know that I should succeed in the end?’

‘You were very much in earnest. You must have been to talk about it to the trees like that. When people are in earnest they are sure to succeed—if they trust in God and St. Anne.’

He crossed himself devoutly.

‘Why in St. Anne more than in any other saint?’

‘Because I say so. Good-night!’

The peasant dismissed his *protégé* as though he had been a King. Nothing remained for Lucien except to bow and do as he was told. He had meant to express his gratitude in a coin; something told him it was not possible.

He laughed as he went along to think how the boy held him in check through the whole interview. When he looked back he saw the little fellow seated on the gate, waving his woollen cap.

It must have been ten or eleven o’clock before he reached the principal inn of Montaigu. He was so tired that he did not even look to see whether Marion de Lorme kept house there before he went in. Hastily ordering his supper, he threw himself down on a couch by the parlour window to rest until it came.

Two men were seated outside on the veranda talking, and, innocent of the fact that they could be overheard, they continued to talk. Lucien did not mean to listen, but one of the men was clearly the young campaigner of the night before, and the first words caught his attention.

‘I thought we were sure to find him here,’ René was saying.

‘Why did not you keep an eye on him? *Treat*

every man as your enemy till you know he's your friend—that's what my glorious old father always says, and, by Heaven! I believe he's right. Not but what I go on the opposite principle myself always.'

'I fancied he would join me on the road. He was as friendly as possible. But when I inquired, I found that he had started an hour earlier, and I have not come up with him all day.'

'Singular! If he were really bound for la Preuille, he must have taken the same road that you did.'

'He may have done so. He started on horseback, and I noticed fresh marks of hoofs—the road is not much frequented, you know—until I came to the last village but one. There they stopped. I was afraid to ask any questions for fear of rousing suspicion.'

'Quite right. He could have been going to the *château* only for one of two purposes. Heaven grant he was not a spy!'

'If he were, why should he tell me that he was going? He said so of his own accord. I never mentioned it.'

'Oh, holy simplicity! To worm your secrets out of you, of course.'

'I do not think he can have been a spy. Ignorant, simple—those were not the words for him. Why, he had never heard the name of Alexander!'

'Impossible! You should have been more wary. He is a spy, René; take my word for it. My splendid old father would have unmasked him in a moment. Why, when he was in Spain, and the troops came in sight of Dulcinea's village and the three windmills, they all began to clap. The commonest French soldier knew the name of Cervantes. And you tell me that an

educated young man has never heard of the Cervantes of our own time! Bah!’

‘Nonsense!’ said René. ‘Dumas is all very well; he is not Cervantes, and not within a hundred miles of him. He never will be. Hugo, now, he has something of the hidalgo if you like; and my young man had heard of Hugo—knew “Marion de Lorme” by heart; noticed that I had written up her name—which I did as a hint for you, my fine friend!—every third day.’

‘All the more conclusive evidence that he was a spy. He knew them both, depend upon it. He wanted to make you talk. He saw that giving you Hugo was like giving you brandy. Hugo goes to your head; you forget yourself.’

In spite of his fatigue, Lucien was becoming interested in this conversation.

Who was the irrepressible man with the hoarse voice and the tiresome father, who insisted that he must be a spy because he knew Victor Hugo, did not know Alexandre Dumas, and was on his way to la Preuille?

Why were they afraid of spies?

What were they going to do?

‘In any case,’ René said, ‘I told him nothing. But the likeness, of which I spoke to you before, is extraordinary. I noticed it the moment I saw him.’

‘Ah!’ said the other man thoughtfully, ‘this bench is rather near the house, and walls have ears. Suppose we take a turn?’

Lucien ate his supper and went to bed without encountering either of them.

‘I wonder,’ he said to himself as he put out his candle—‘I wonder who I am and what I am doing!’

CHAPTER X

THE LADY IN THE GREEN VEIL

LUCIEN came down early enough the next morning, but the two gentlemen whose discourse he overheard the night before had outstripped him. René had not played cards with himself on this occasion. They started, the host said, as soon as it was light.

‘Get ready a horse for me at once,’ Lucien said.

It angered him to think that he could not by any possibility reach the *château* de la Preuille so soon as they would.

While he was drinking a cup of coffee, three other men came in. They were not in uniform, but by their bearing he judged them to be officers. Two of them rode horses of their own, and stopped only to bait. The third was on foot, and demanded one instantly.

‘I regret that I am unable to oblige you, sir. Two of my horses are out, and the only animal at our disposal is already engaged.’

‘I cannot help that,’ retorted the officer. ‘I am willing to pay what you like, but I must have it. You can make what excuses you will to the other man.’

‘I happen to be the other man,’ said Lucien, rising. ‘I am sorry that it is impossible to do as you wish. But I am bound to be at the *château* de la Preuille this morning, and I have no time to lose.’

‘Oh, I beg your pardon!’ said the officer, with great

politeness. 'In that case I should not think of hindering you. I dare say some blacksmith will furnish me with an old hack. Your pardon, sir.'

Lucien sprang to the saddle, and rode off at a gallop.

What was there about the name of the *château* which acted like a charm on all the people that he met? He was within a few hours of it now. What should he find when he got there?

Presently he heard the sound of hoofs behind him. Looking back, he saw the three officers riding as if for life.

They also were on the road to la Preuille.

Everyone who was going there was going in a great hurry. Lucien set spurs to his horse. He was determined not to be beaten in this race, whatever happened.

The *château* de la Preuille!

He pictured to himself a mass of towers and turrets clothed in dark ivy, a drawbridge, a portcullis, a withered hag; and further than the withered hag he had not gone, when he drew rein.

'Stop at the first large gate that you come to,' Mine Host of the inn had said.

It was a gate of curled and twisted iron, on one side of which stood a neat little whitewashed lodge, with a row of blue and pink hyacinths in the window. He could hardly bring himself to ask the tidy old woman, who came out like a figure in a weather-house, whether this were indeed the *château* de la Preuille.

However, it is not safe to weigh one's own conviction of the fitness of things against the direct testimony of a fellow-mortal, even if she be but a tidy old woman, and the gate stood open as though it expected

him; so Lucien galloped on between the bushes of laurestinus. Several riders must have passed that way before. He saw grooms and stable-boys with their horses as he rode up.

There was not the faintest air of mystery about the *château* de la Preuille. It was a solid, square, comfortable, stone dwelling, built by a man of no imagination. In front of it lay a broad, sunny lawn. The door, like the gate, was standing open, and Lucien could look into the hall, which seemed to be used as a breakfast-room. A long table was laid out with glass and silver, and all the preparations for just such a good breakfast as he longed to make.

‘Tell colonel de Nacquart that monsieur Lucien Sylvestre requests the honour of an interview with him.’

The servant took his horse at once, as if it were a matter of course, and ushered him in.

‘Ah, there you are, my friend of the road!’ cried René le Romain, breaking from a group of six or seven gentlemen round the fireplace, and seizing his hand.

‘He does not believe me to be a spy, at any rate,’ thought Lucien.

At that moment a small, stout, bald man, with a ring of thin white hair, entered the room. Lucien was not reassured by his manner.

‘Monsieur Sylvestre?’ he said, coldly inquiring. ‘The name is quite unknown to me. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance.’

The other men, who had gathered round, fell back a little, except René.

‘Have I the honour of speaking to colonel de Nacquart?’

‘I am colonel de Nacquart, sir.’

‘Then I have only to deliver this packet into your hands. I was desired to bring it to you from Lyons.’

‘I am obliged to you,’ said the colonel in tones which suggested that he would rather have said, ‘Be hanged!’

But he took the packet, and, muttering a hasty apology, went out.

There was an awkward pause.

No one spoke to Lucien.

René was so desirous to speak that he could find nothing to say.

‘There is a very fine view from the windows, is there not?’ he began at last.

‘Very fine,’ said Lucien, who could see nothing but the lawn. ‘Is that an owl hooting? How strange in broad daylight!’

The next moment he coloured at his own simplicity, for a sound of hooting all round convinced him that the owl he had heard did not wear wings.

The colonel was not long absent, however.

On his return he went straight up to Lucien and took both his hands.

‘Forgive me, my dear guest. If I had known, your reception would have been different. One cannot be too cautious just now. I am sure you will understand that. Have I your pardon?’

‘I have nothing to forgive,’ said Lucien. ‘I fear that I have thrust myself upon you at an inconvenient moment. It is for you to forgive me.’

‘Well, well!’ said the colonel, his small black eyes twinkling, ‘suppose we go to breakfast without further ado. We will have a private conversation afterwards,

if you please. Here comes my daughter-in-law! This is my friend, Monsieur Achille Guibourg. Allow me to introduce you to him. Lay another place, Didier. See that Monsieur Sylvestre makes a good breakfast. A word with you, Achille.'

He drew Guibourg aside and whispered something in his ear. The young man nodded, and returned to Lucien.

The colonel took the head, and his daughter-in-law, a pretty blonde, with soft, straw-coloured hair, the foot of the table. There were no other ladies present. Guibourg and Lucien were placed together near the middle. As René sat next madame de Nacquart, and the gentlemen between were absorbed in eager conversation among themselves, Lucien was thrown upon his new acquaintance.

'Have you been long in la Vendée?' inquired Guibourg. 'No? Ah, it is terrible, the state of things! Madame de Nacquart here could tell you a tale. The Government soldiers broke into this house the other day, and smashed her work-table all to pieces.'

'The wretches! Were they afraid of an attack of pins and needles?' Lucien said laughing. His spirits had revived under the influence of a dish of scrambled eggs and a glass of Beaune.

'I do not know what they will take it into their heads to be afraid of next. It is impossible that we can go on as we are now. May I recommend you to take some of this cabbage? It is not *pancallier*. I can assure you of that.'

'*Pancallier*? What is *pancallier*?' wondered Lucien; but he did not betray his ignorance.

'The state of the country is quite awful,' continued

Guibourg, with the utmost cheerfulness. 'For myself, I should not be surprised whatever happened, should you?'

'Why, no,' said Lucien. 'I might be rather surprised if there were an earthquake. Mere childishness, of course. Everything is surprising in this world—or nothing. It comes to much the same.'

'Just so. We must be prepared for a social earthquake. Dermoncourt himself said to a friend of mine the other day, "We old soldiers know the taste of war from whatever part it may come, and the air from la Vendée is full of it." If that be the opinion of Louis-Philippe's *generalissimo*, whose interest it is to keep the peace if possible, what is the common soldier likely to think?'

'I heard in Lyons that there were numbers of secret agents about everywhere.'

'A perfect plague of them! Vidocq is a great organizer, no doubt; but if you overdo it, you may find you are organizing a rebellion where you thought you were organizing defence. People are beginning to wonder where it will end.'

'They are indeed,' said a gentleman on the other side of Guibourg. 'The fish-ponds on the estate next to this have been drained, for fear there might be weapons concealed in the mud at the bottom!'

'The people of our village could get no bread last week, because the soldiers had destroyed the baker's oven in their search for powder,' said someone else.

'They spoil all the flax and the hemp with their rummaging, too.'

'Small wonder that not a priest for miles round can be got to say "*Domine, saluum fac regem Philippum!*"'

‘They pray for Henri Cinq, I suppose?’ said Lucien.

‘I believe you. And for Marie-Caroline, Regent.’

‘What was that?’ said de Nacquart, laying down his knife and fork. ‘I thought I heard wheels.’

Conversation ceased instantly all along the table.

‘No, no!’ whispered madame de Nacquart nervously. ‘You made a mistake, papa.’

‘They are coming in at the gate,’ he said.

Guibourg muttered under his breath a word that sounded like ‘Heaven be thanked!’ As though moved by a sudden irresistible impulse, every one of the guests rushed to the window. Lucien followed, wondering. Why all this agitation about an ordinary carriage full of ordinary people? They alighted quickly—so quickly that he had no time to examine them in detail.

Colonel de Nacquart looked at his daughter-in-law.

‘Let us take her upstairs at once. The room is quite ready,’ she said.

They seemed to have changed characters. She was calm now—he flustered and nervous.

‘Gentlemen,’ she went on, turning to the rest, ‘a friend of the family is arriving earlier than we expected. She must pass through this hall on her way upstairs. I shall not introduce her to you. You will, I know, forgive the complete absence of ceremony. She has had a long journey; she must be very tired.’

Madame de Nacquart spoke in a loud voice.

‘She wants the servants to hear,’ thought Lucien.

The colonel made a rush for the door, bowing almost to the ground. Lucien thought—then thought he

must be wrong—that, by a scarcely perceptible gesture, his daughter-in-law tried to stop him. Yet she curtsied herself.

A little lady dressed in gray, wearing a straw hat and a green veil which concealed her features, entered first.

After her came another lady and two gentlemen.

Everyone made way respectfully.

Not a word was spoken. A breathless hush prevailed as they glided through the hall, and vanished in madame de Nacquart's train, her father-in-law accompanying them.

The look of strained attention on every face disappeared. The younger men, without exception, grew radiant, the others perplexed and doubtful. Guibourg tossed a roll into the air and caught it again, as if he could hardly contain himself.

Still no one spoke.

The butler and the footman solemnly continued to hand round silver dishes of cutlets. Each man took a cutlet, but no one had any appetite. They lay untouched on the plates.

'Thank-you,' said Guibourg to the butler. 'We will await the return of Madame'—his neighbour started and stared at him—'de Nacquart,' he added hurriedly.

He drew a long breath as the servants left the room, and the other guests testified to their satisfaction by coughs, sighs, grunts, and suppressed laughter. But no one knew how to begin.

'It is,' one said at last.

'Is what?' asked Lucien.

'Oh—very hot this morning!'

'The conditions have not been observed,' remarked another stiffly.

'*Pancallier!*' cried the young man beside him—the same who had lodged at the inn with René the night before.

Lucien could restrain his curiosity no longer.

'Would you be so kind as to tell me the meaning of that expression?' he said.

'I will, sir,' retorted the young man fiercely, as who should say, *If you want me to run a dagger into you, I have not the slightest objection.* 'It is a word we use in this part of the country for a kind of cabbage that grows very fast—oh, very fast indeed!—and has plenty of leaves, but no heart.'

'May I inquire, sir, what caused you to allude to this interesting vegetable?'

'Only, sir, the strange resemblance of some gentlemen to a cabbage of that order. It strikes one painfully—irresistibly.'

'Am I the only sane man among a bevy of lunatics, or the only idiot in a houseful of reasonable people?' Lucien asked himself.

'How exquisite she is!' murmured René.

'I thought her plain.'

'What did you think, sir?' shouted the fierce young man, turning on Lucien.

'She may be Venus in person, or she may have pink eyes, and snakes in her hair like Medusa, for all I know. I saw nothing except a hat and a green veil.'

'*Pancallier!*' cried the furious young man. 'She walked with the step of a——'

'Goddess?' René suggested.

The young man had broken short off. Guibourg strode up to him and took him by both shoulders.

‘Look here!’ he said, not unkindly. ‘You forget that Monsieur Sylvestre has come among us as a stranger. Where are your manners, de Monti? What business have you—has any one of us—to discuss the lady in this way? Be quiet! A cabbage is bad enough, but, upon my conscience, a fool is worse!’

CHAPTER XI

THE CAPTURE OF BLUM

'A *gentleman* wishes to speak to you, sir,' said the butler. (The emphasis on the word was doubtful.) 'He will not come in. He says he must see you at once.'

Lucien rose impatiently, as if someone had called him out of a theatre at the moment when the curtain was going to rise. Who might this gentleman be? What did he want?

His annoyance changed to astonishment when, at the foot of the steps, he beheld Charles Blum, hot and flushed, pounding his forehead with a tightly-rolled red cotton handkerchief, which seemed to make it redder.

'Plague take me if you are worth all the trouble I put myself to on your account!' was his first observation.

Lucien thought that it called for no reply. Through the open window he heard the voice of someone addressing those within.

'You must return with me at once,' continued Blum. 'You were sent here for no good—I am convinced of that. You will only be mixed up in a foolish Legitimist rising which can have but one end. The duchess is mad enough to attempt anything, but Louis-Philippe's troops are all over the country. She has not a chance of escape. Come back with me at

once to Lyons. The editor of the *Glaneuse* will be thankful to give you work on your own terms. He repented as soon as he had let you slip. He charged me to bring you back at any cost.'

Lucien hesitated. Through the window came the murmur of voices; now one rose higher and now another. Here was an evident way out of the difficulties that surrounded him. Why not avail himself of it? Blum spoke the truth, most likely, being seldom fanciful enough to speak anything else. He had but to leave a message to the effect that urgent business called him away, and he would be quit of these odd people and their enigmatical talk. But then he hated the evident way.

'You are a practical man, Blum. You must see that I cannot afford to lose the fruit of my journey. I have not yet been able to speak in private with colonel de Nacquart, and before I have done so I cannot decide upon my future course.'

Again those voices through the window. They were all in accord now, speaking together.

'Tell me,' said Blum: 'have you any idea what you are about? Have you ascertained why you were sent here in the first instance?'

'I am as ignorant as on the day I set out.'

'Do you know,' went on Blum, his voice rising louder and louder, 'that this house is a noted stronghold of disaffection—that the whole neighbourhood is full of conspirators?'

'And if it were?' said Lucien, kicking a pebble.

'Are you so blind to your own interests?'

'For all I know, they may be better served by my

remaining. You forget that I am a Legitimist; you forget also that I have not been paid.'

Blum laughed.

'Well,' said he, 'let them pay you for what you have done; that is fair enough. I will wait until you have finished; then we can return to Lyons together.'

'Impossible! You cannot wait here; it may be hours before I am ready. Go back to Montaigu, and I will come to you there.'

'No,' said Blum, with dogged determination, 'I am not going till you go with me.'

Immediately after Lucien's departure the marquis had been pointed out to him in the streets of Lyons, and the editor of the *Glaneuse* had mentioned that he was well known in earlier days as an ardent partisan of the Bourbons. Without even staying to tell Mademoiselle Jeanne, Blum had started at once to aid and rescue the victim. He would not be beaten now.

'I will not trust you among these men,' he went on; 'I have no confidence in them. Can you not send word to Nacquart that you are in haste, that you wish to see him without delay?'

Lucien shrugged his shoulders, and ran up the steps into the hall, rather to escape Blum than to look for the colonel. The gentlemen whom he had left were all gathered about one of the windows. Nobody turned round when he entered. He felt sure that they had been watching him as he walked up and down with Blum on the gravel terrace.

'Will you not ask your friend into the house, sir?' Guibourg said, speaking more gravely than the occasion seemed to demand.

'Thank-you,' said Lucien, trying without success to

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answer as if it were a matter of course; 'there is no need. I shall rejoin him directly; I am only waiting to say good-bye to my host.'

'The colonel is busy at present; you may have some time to wait.'

'Yes,' René said, with eager interest; 'he had far better come into the house. I will go and fetch him.'

The air round Lucien seemed to be thick with cobwebs; as fast as he tore his way through them, invisible spiders were weaving them again. One thing alone was clear: Blum should not be permitted to enter the house.

'Do not go!' he said, detaining René. 'Indeed he would rather remain outside.'

There was a hurried, indefinite stir and drawing together of the party round the window.

'Do you not see that he must either go or stay?' said René, in an excited whisper. 'The situation is impossible.'

'Impossible!' said Guibourg.

Lucien looked from the anxious faces beside him to the threatening faces at the window, and out beyond to the sturdy red face of Blum. Why was it impossible that he should go on walking up and down the terrace?

Again the sound of wheels. The same carriage drove round to the door with fresh horses. René gave a low sigh.

'Too late now! We must run the risk.'

'Who is the gentleman in front of the house?' said a gentle voice, which Lucien took to be that of madame de Nacquart.

He looked in the direction whence it came. The inner door was open; there stood a little lady in gray,

wearing a straw hat and a green veil, the former occupants of the carriage, and the colonel. Madame de Nacquart, however, was nowhere to be seen.

Everyone looked at Lucien as though expecting him to answer. Desperately conscious that, whatever the occasion might be, it was not an occasion for telling the truth, he could not find out any invention.

‘It is a friend of mine. He came from Lyons to speak to me on private business.’

‘Perhaps we might set him on his way,’ said the lady. ‘May I inquire his name?’

In cold blood Lucien could have found a dozen imaginary names in as many seconds; not one would occur to him now.

‘Charles Blum,’ he said, and felt as if he were signing a warrant.

‘I told you so,’ cried one of the younger men. ‘I knew him; he writes for the *Glaneuse*. A low Republican rascal!’

‘Pardon me,’ said Lucien, stepping forward, his eyes on fire, ‘I do not hear him spoken of in those terms.’

The lady laughed.

‘We are all Republicans,’ she said softly. ‘It is nothing but jealousy on the part of this gentleman—two of a trade. Let me speak to him.’

She went down the steps to the terrace, and accosted the unwelcome visitor.

‘Yes, that will be best,’ they heard her say aloud. Then she addressed the colonel: ‘Monsieur Blum is willing to come with me as far as Bressuire. I told him that we had all heard of the fame of his articles. I cannot refuse myself the pleasure of a little discussion.

Besides, you know what we heard this morning. He may learn something to the advantage of his paper.'

'I shall wait for you at Bressuire,' shouted Blum, waving his hand.

Lucien stood petrified.

'Be sure you wait until he comes!' René cried.

Bowing and smiling, Blum scrambled into the carriage. In another moment he was seated opposite the little lady; Guibourg and two others jumped in after them, and they were driven off.

CHAPTER XII

THE FORDING OF THE RIVER

‘I AM happy to make over to you the sum agreed upon,’ said the colonel, bestowing a thousand francs on Lucien. ‘The person to whom this packet is addressed is not here. I cannot believe that it is your intention to return to Lyons. You would doubtless wish to pursue your researches further?’

Lucien, who was still pondering over the mystery of the rape of Blum, did not reply at once.

‘He does wish to return to Lyons—I knew he did!’ muttered the excited young man. ‘*Pancallier!*’

The word roused Lucien. A man naturally dislikes to be called a cabbage.

‘Of course I desire to take this packet to the person to whom it is addressed,’ he said.

The young man shrugged his shoulders; he still said *Pancallier* with his shoulders.

‘In that case’—de Nacquart drew Lucien into the recess of a window—‘you will have to stay here for the next few hours. Names are not mentioned among us. Two of my guests will accompany you to the right place after nightfall.’

‘I am completely in the dark by daylight,’ Lucien said. ‘Am I allowed to ask one single question? The name of one person only?’

De Nacquart looked at him suspiciously.

‘Whose name do you wish to know?’

‘That of the gentleman in whose service I find myself.’

The colonel’s look of blank astonishment was quickly followed by one of utter distrust.

‘I do not understand the young men of these days,’ he said. ‘Go or stay as you like. I have no time for talking.’

‘I have never heard the name of Dumas—therefore I am a spy. I do not know the Breton name for a cabbage—therefore I am a traitor. I do not know—because I have no means of knowing—the name of my employer—therefore I am a spy and a traitor both. What strange conclusions they draw!’ thought Lucien; but all he said was, ‘I think, sir, with your consent, I will stay.’

‘Very well. Pray make use of my study there, or of the garden, whichever you prefer. My two friends will be ready for you here on the steps at five o’clock.’

Lucien availed himself of the permission to be free, and wandered into the garden.

He cherished a hope that madame de Nacquart might appear there. He thought her kind, and perhaps she might be willing to talk otherwise than in riddles. Even if she were not, he had longed, ever since that night at Morfontaine, to measure himself against a woman. Yet, unaccountably, he felt that she was gone—that she never would come; and she never did.

He was resting under a hawthorn, his head on his hand, when the glint of the sun upon a tarnished gold button, at the end of a green woollen cap, caught his eye. He started to his feet. It was—yes—no—why,

yes—it was the peasant boy of the night before, walking briskly across! In such a world of strangers an acquaintance of twelve hours' standing was better than none.

‘Good-morning.’

The boy touched his cap.

‘So you got out of the wood?’

‘I did—thanks to your instructions.’

‘I have no time to stop. You must walk beside me to the gate, if you wish for my company.’

He spoke with the air of one conferring a favour. Certainly he was not like other boys.

‘Then you are not going to stay here?’

‘Are you?’

‘No. But I wish you could tell me again which way I am going.’

‘I can,’ said the boy. ‘You are going to the estate of le Mortier, not far from Rémouillé. Do not tell anyone. If anyone asks you, you had better not know yourself. I was born in the forest. I wear the colours of the forest. I understand these things. I hope you will not be drenched.’

‘Why should you say that? The sky is blue.’

‘The weather changes often in these parts,’ the boy said, with a sigh. ‘Here we are at the gate. Farewell!’

Lucien had often heard it said that a boy's voice is like a woman's, and he remembered this as he turned back to the hawthorn.

He saw his fellows at the breakfast-table ride away, one by one, down the avenue, at long intervals of time; and when the last was gone, the house lay still and square and solid in the sunshine.

Slowly, slowly at first—then quickly and ever more quickly, everything about the house fell asleep. The windows left off winking—the leaves of the trees—the yellow tulips in the vases. They slept profoundly; and Lucien slept also.

He was awakened by a shower.

Good heavens! was he only just in time? The house was still asleep—not a gleam of light from the windows—dully asleep in the rain. There were two people standing on the steps, heavily cloaked. He rushed towards them. One was a delicate, elderly man with courtly, old-fashioned ways. The other looked and walked like a soldier, and carried a lantern.

The elder glanced anxiously at the sky; it showed no sign of clearing.

They bowed, but said nothing. Lucien understood their silence to mean silence, and dared not ask for the colonel. Besides, he knew as well as if they had told him, that de Nacquart was not there. No one was there, of those who had been there.

Soon after they left the avenue it grew dark, and the rain increased in violence, as if it were determined to beat down the wind, while the wind strove to bear it up, swinging the lantern roughly to and fro in the effort.

They walked through fields of high grass till they reached a large, half-timbered house which stood by itself without garden or inclosure of any kind.

The lantern-bearer knocked slowly twice, three times lightly and fast, and the door was opened by the officer who had wanted Lucien's horse for la Preuille.

‘Welcome to le Mortier!’ he said, not discerning his third guest. ‘It is a fearful night. I hope that you will be able to persuade Petit-Pierre to stay.’

There was the peasant boy again, standing by a chest in the entry, his hand on a pistol. Above his head a trophy of ancient weapons gleamed coldly in the dim light.

‘My advice is, to stay,’ said the soldier. ‘No one ought to be out on such a night as this.’

‘The ford is dangerous,’ the other man added.

The boy’s face kindled at the word. He nodded his head gravely.

‘Very well. As you will,’ said the soldier.

The master of the house made no further remark, and they set forth again, the soldier and the boy in front, with a rough-looking man in a sheepskin, who had helped to unbar the door.

‘You are the guide—Le Normand?’ the light-bearer said to this last recruit.

‘Yes.’

‘They speak as little here, as if every word cost a franc,’ thought Lucien.

‘How long will it take us to get to Bellecour?’

‘It is four miles by the road.’

‘And the soldiers?’

‘They are encamped all along.’

‘But if we crossed the Moine?’

‘The Moine is dangerous.’

‘How much time should we save?’

‘Nearly an hour.’

‘We escape the soldiers, too?’

‘Yes, but the Moine is dangerous.’

‘We will go by the Moine,’ said the boy.

So said, so done. Le Normand left the beaten track, and plunged in among the bramble-bushes.

Some time after, they came out on to a low cliff, as Lucien judged by the brawl of water down below. All at once the lantern went out.

'Useless to try and relight. We must do without it.'

'There is no bridge?'

'No—only planks laid across.'

'I know the Moine. It is full of choking water-weeds. Be careful, de Charette.'

De Charette! The name of the great chief of la Vendée startled Lucien. What was his descendant doing in this wild place in the heart of the night?

They were on the edge of the cliff now. They could not see the torrent at their feet, but the roar of it conquered the wind.

'Hold back, de Mesnard!' cried the baron.

A little hand put him gently aside.

'I go first,' said the boy.

'If the plank gives way,' shouted the guide, 'there is another higher up. Give me your hand, sir. We will come back for these gentlemen.'

What followed, Lucien, though he strained his eyes, could hardly see.

Between Le Normand and the baron their charge crossed one half-rotten plank in safety, and the first of the great water-worn boulders which formed a chain of stepping-stones through the flood was gained. A moment more, and he stood firm upon the second, Le Normand still leading.

'They are half across now. There is only one more stone left. Ah! what was that? Have they slipped?'

'Come! come!' cried Lucien.

He took the old man on his shoulders. The weight which he acquired in this way enabled him to withstand the terrific force of the current. He was broad and thickset, and the water was not more than four or five feet deep, yet he felt as if his legs were of straw. Just when, for sheer lack of breath in the buffeting of wind and wave, he thought he must have failed, he won the shore, and let his burden slip gently to the ground. A dripping figure stooped and helped the old man to rise. An anxious voice cried:

‘You are not hurt, Monsieur de Mesnard?’

‘No, no! And you—what happened?’

‘Le Normand slipped,’ said the boy. ‘He had my hand and pulled me in. The baron tried to hold me, but I was stronger than he; I dragged him down. Yes, Monsieur le baron, I am stronger than you.’

‘Agreed! agreed!’ said de Charette. ‘You had the courage to let go my hand. If you had not done so, we should both have been killed.’

‘You never made a sound.’

‘It is not my way,’ the boy said.

He threw his head back, then bent it for a moment over his clasped hands.

‘God and St. Anne to the rescue!’ thought Lucien. ‘Brave little fellow!’

‘You have not heard the end of the story,’ the boy went on, laughing and turning to de Mesnard. ‘The baron brought me to land, feet foremost. What a special providence, Monsieur le baron, that you knew how to swim!’

‘It is not a special providence that Le Normand and I should have lost our cloaks in the torrent,’ said the baron. ‘We have nothing to put round you. We

THE FORDING OF THE RIVER III

must return to le Mortier at once. You cannot go on as you are.'

Without a word the old man put a cloak round the boy's shoulders. His teeth were chattering, and he accepted it.

A shade of astonishment crossed Lucien's mind. After all, the boy was young, and Monsieur de Mesnard was not.

'The adventures of the Owls were far worse,' he said as he fastened it. 'Well, to-day I have been under water; to-morrow, we must hope, I shall be under fire. The episode will look funny enough in my Memoirs. It is a good beginning.'

His Memoirs! What business had he to think of his Memoirs? A remarkable peasant boy, no doubt. Perhaps he had designed his dress also with a view to his Memoirs.

'You can take us back to le Mortier without crossing that cursed river again?' de Charette asked of the guide.

Le Normand signed assent.

Lucien thought that it must be midnight by the time they stood once more under the low porch. He could hardly believe his ears when he heard an astonished voice say:

'What! back again! It is only an hour and a half since you started.'

'You do not say so! What luck! Quick! some brandy and a change of under-clothing.'

The boy was hurried upstairs by his host, de Charette and de Mesnard following. Le Normand disappeared into the kitchen. Lucien sank down on a fur rug close to the stove. He was thankful for rest

and warmth, and he hoped they would stay there until morning.

The hour that followed seemed to him to be five minutes long.

‘Are the horses ready?’

It was the inexorable boy calling over the balustrade.

‘Dear me!’ thought Lucien. ‘Are we going to ride through that river now?’

‘They are ready,’ said the voice of the host below.

De Charette came forward.

‘Monsieur Sylvestre and I will walk in front,’ he said. He turned to the boy, speaking with great respect, but firmly: ‘You will be on horseback behind Le Normand. De Mesnard is to ride in the rear. If there is any sign of danger, I will lay my hand on your bridle, and you must fly—fly for your life. Will you promise me this?’

‘I promise,’ the boy said.

‘Where are we going?’ Lucien asked.

‘To Bellecour, as before. But we cannot go by the river. We must get there while it is still dark; and one of us is too young, and one too old, for more walking; that makes the horses imperative. Still, they increase the risk. By the way, are you able to walk?’

‘Perfectly.’

Le Normand sprang into the saddle.

De Mesnard was already on horseback.

De Charette had turned back to reload the pistols he carried with him.

The boy looked round.

‘Will no one help me to mount?’ he said.

In an instant Lucien knew that this was not a boy at all, but a woman.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EMERALD RING

LUCIEN pondered over his discovery as he walked along by the side of de Charette. The wind was conquering the rain at last.

He had thought the boy a strange boy always, but he was accustomed to find strangeness in things which, to common people, were common enough. He had been a strange boy himself, so that he discounted first impressions. Most boys were not like that—so much he had learnt by this time. The boy was probably as common, for a boy, as the elm-tree out of which he dropped might be for an elm. Only the twilight hour, the budding, bewildering wood, the fancy of the live, womanish trees, caused them to appear magical. Yet he had pleased himself exceedingly with the recollection. For once the world without claimed some connection with the inner world, and common-sense could not explain everything.

But if the boy were a woman?

Later on, at le Mortier, when he saw the deference with which his lightest wish was treated by the elder men, it struck him that the peasant's dress must be a disguise. This was perhaps the scion of a noble house, deeply compromised in some Legitimist plot. But a woman!

'She is not pretty—she is not in the least pretty,' Lucien said to himself, as if the words were a defence.

'The tents!' muttered de Charette. 'I wish the rain had not stopped. It was darker before. Slowly—more slowly, Le Normand!'

'Do as he tells you!' cried de Mesnard in the tone of a man whose nerves are strained beyond endurance.

'Hush!' said the little figure. 'There is no cause for uneasiness yet.'

The quiet pacing of the horses rang like thunder in Lucien's ears. How was it possible the sentries should not hear?

Yet they went on unchallenged.

Suddenly a bugle rang out.

De Mesnard groaned.

Le Normand pulled up.

Even de Charette hesitated.

'Go on,' said the quiet voice again; 'it is nothing.'

'Who can she be?' thought Lucien.

Row upon row of tents. Did they reach to the end of the world? Would they never be passed? If they caught her, what would they do to her?

The glimmer of the camp-fires died away at last; but there were houses all along the road. Here and there a light gleaming from a cottage window showed that one was sick and one was wakeful and one was dying in the little village of Montbert.

De Charette signalled a halt.

'We cannot take the horses down the street. Someone would be sure to look out. Ride back, Le Normand, and be sure you make no noise. We must walk the rest of the way. Are you very tired, Petit-Pierre?'

'I never felt fresher in my life,' Petit-Pierre said, springing lightly to the ground.

That was her peasant name, then! What softly-sounding *Louise, Claire, Isabelle*, had she exchanged for it? Where was her father—where were her brothers, that they let her go masquerading through the world in this manner? Anything might happen; a furious desire to protect her filled Lucien's soul.

It was one in the morning before they reached Belle-cour.

De Charette repeated the heavy double knock, the three light taps. An old woman opened the door, and smiled a broad beneficent welcome.

'Take the little gentleman here to the kitchen. Make up a good fire and get some supper. Where are the others, Marie?'

'Upstairs,' the old woman said, pointing to a ladder. Once more de Charette led the way.

In a kind of loft, playing cards by the light of a candle stuck in a hole in the side of a cask, sat three young men, one of whom Lucien recognised as the adorer of Marion, another as the son of an illustrious father. The third was very young indeed, and handsome, with a trick of blushing like a girl.

'Where have I seen him before?' thought Lucien; and remembered him as the boy who led the crowd outside the editor's office in Lyons.

'So the warrants are out against you, Edouard?'

'That is nothing new. They will have to run a long way before they catch me. Le Romain here and Prévost de Saint-Marc are ready to answer for that.'

'With our lives!' de Saint-Marc said, and blushed crimson.

'Go down, René le Romain,' said de Charette; 'there is someone in the kitchen whom you will be in-

terested to see. Keep your tongue in your head, by the way, if Marie is about.'

Le Romain descended the ladder with an agility which suggested that he was familiar with that description of staircase, but in a minute or two he came back.

'What did you tell me to go down there for? If this is a joke, I call it a very silly one.'

'Why, my dear fellow, you saw——'

'A boy that looks like a drowned rat! A refractory conscript, I suppose? joined us because he cannot stand the drill.'

De Charette laughed low, like a man accustomed to control his emotions.

'Come down, all of you!'

Lucien was filled with great contempt for Le Romain. A refractory conscript! Had he no eyes?

The kitchen looked warm, comfortable and bright after the draughty, mouldy garret. Shining plates, adorned with pictures of scarlet cocks and hens, were ranged along the dresser. The light danced on the pewter pots and saucepans. Petit-Pierre had taken off his thick, muddy shoes, and was holding his little stockinged feet straight out to the fire.

De Charette glanced at the old woman and laid a finger on his lip. She placed a dish of stew upon the table and went away. He took out his watch, held it in his hand till it had marked the flight of five long minutes, opened the door cautiously and shut it again.

'All's well,' he said. 'There is no one listening.'

Petit-Pierre had not taken any notice of these proceedings, nor of the three young men, but now he raised his hand and saluted.

As he did so, the flame leapt for an instant in a ring

of emerald, which he wore on the third finger, and Lucien's heart stood still.

Where had he seen that ring last?

On the little hand that thrust itself through the curtains at Morfontaine, and dropped a manuscript at his feet.

'Introduce me to these gentlemen, Monsieur de Charette!' said Petit-Pierre.

He rose as he spoke, and took off his green woollen cap.

He cut an odd figure standing there in his yellow waistcoat and dark-blue overall; yet Lucien felt no inclination to laugh. He was in the room with a very grand lady. Petit-Pierre let him see that.

'Allow me to introduce to you,' said de Charette, 'my good friends, Monsieur le Romain and Monsieur Prévost de Saint-Marc, and my young aide-de-camp and cousin, Edouard de Monti de Rezé. For a year past, whenever I have been in peril—and that is not seldom—Edouard has taken care to endanger his life at the same time.'

'I trust to know more of him very shortly. Now you must introduce me.'

'We stand in the presence of Madame Marie-Caroline, duchesse de Berry, mother of Henri Cinq, Regent of France,' de Charette said.

In the dead silence that followed it seemed to Lucien as if the troops far away beyond Montbert must have heard; and old Marie, as she lumbered to and fro up in the garret.

De Saint-Marc had turned white as a sheet.

'Is the apparition so dreadful?' she said, laughing.

'It is—it is indeed!' he cried. 'To know you here

—you—you—in the midst of your enemies—the mother of my King—the hope of France——’

He stopped.

A look of longing for some distant person flitted over the duchess’s face—and was gone.

‘It is for him that we are here, both you and I,’ she said softly. ‘You have suffered for him more than I, Monsieur. If you could see how sweet a child it is, how gallant, how courageous, you would be ready to suffer to the death, as I am.’

‘That is our part, Madame, not yours.’

‘You must not be afraid for me. God and St. Anne protect me. I have no fear—no fear at all. Besides, I feel as those ladies of Scott’s feel in the Waverley Novels. I was Mary Stuart once—long ago—at a ball. I am Mary Stuart now. I have always loved wandering Queens.’

She broke off.

‘Come, let us go to supper! You must put some red into those white cheeks of yours, or I shall call you my Knight of the Cholera. It is the cholera that is King of France now. Monsieur de Charette, will you sit on my right?—Monsieur Sylvestre, here? I have been your guide before, have I not?’

‘And you have been my judge, Madame,’ said Lucien, with a glance at the ring. ‘I did not know at the time that I stood before such an august tribunal.’

The other men looked blank.

‘It is our secret—his and mine,’ said the duchess, laughing. ‘We may have yet another to discuss before bed-time. I know my secret will be as safe with you, Monsieur Sylvestre, as yours will be with me. Your hand upon it.’

She said the last words with great seriousness. Lucien could not conceive what she meant. She laid her brown fingers lightly on his.

‘But the hand was white.’

Were his thoughts audible to her?

‘Walnut-juice, applied by a great artist like myself, paints a hand brown as well as Rembrandt could,’ she said pensively.

‘But I have seen her—you—you yourself—since then.’

‘Yes. It was a duchess who arrived at la Preuille—it was madame de Nacquart—and it was Petit-Pierre who went away. She took the duchess’s gray dress, her hat and cloak, you see—and a *pencil that I never meant her to take*—but Petit-Pierre kept her ring. Come, supper is getting cold. Look at my poor Cholera! He must eat.’

Had she caught a spark of the fire of the sun where she was born? No one could come near her but he was warmed and brightened. The kitchen glowed with hospitality. The sour cider tasted like wine because she said it was good.

Spite of hunger, each man declined a second portion of the stew, but the duchess insisted on finishing it herself, because the cook would be disappointed if any of it were left.

‘Your Royal Highness showed greater courage just now than at the crossing of the Mointe,’ said old De Mesnard, with a smile, as they drew their chairs from the table.

‘Perhaps I did—perhaps I did,’ said the duchess. ‘Nothing venture, nothing have. After all, I was hungry. Where am I to sleep? Shall I stay here?’

De Charette held a hurried consultation with Marie, who was clearing away the dishes.

‘There is a bed, Madame.’

‘You do not say so! How enchanting!’

‘It is the only one in the house. But the comte de Suzannet was laid there to die of his wounds after the affair of le Roche-Servière. You may not like——’

‘Oh yes!’ she said. I shall sleep all the better for resting where a brave man died. Go you, then, and get it ready for me. Monsieur de Mesnard, I insist on your retiring for the night; you are very weary. Leave Monsieur Sylvestre here. I want to speak to him.’

Was Lucien happy or terrified to be left alone with her?

He did not know.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAUSE

THEY were both silent.

It seemed to Lucien as though the hour of some tremendous event in life had struck—to die, or to be married—when he was unprepared. That he could not even conjecture what the event might be, made no difference. Only he repeated to himself over and over again, violently, defensively, as he had said ‘*She is not beautiful*,’ a later observation—‘*She is not young*.’

To her it seemed as though she were about to risk all that she valued most on a single throw of the dice.

‘But I must do it,’ she said—‘I must do it.’ And she prayed to St. Anne.

Then, without preface of any kind, she dashed straight at the thought that was piercing her like a dagger.

‘Monsieur Sylvestre, I am a woman. The sight of blood is terrible to me. Bah! if I cut my finger I hate to look.’

Lucien tried to understand. She was saying that she hated the sight of a scratch. This was not what he had braced himself to hear. He made no reply.

‘You are like the rest,’ she cried. ‘You think I do not know, I do not care. You think I am weak, light—that I have no strength to endure to the end. You think I am for myself alone.’

‘I think nothing of all this,’ Lucien said.

He spoke earnestly, yet she did not hear him. Her restless eyes fixed themselves on a distant corner of the room, as if she saw there something from which they could not lift themselves.

‘You forget,’ she went on. ‘God did not kill my husband. A man killed him. It was red. I have seen. I know.’

She paused, shuddering, as if she had reached the limit of words.

‘It will be red again. They will say I did it. They will curse me. How can I help that? He told me to come. *You will succeed in la Vendée*. I heard him. It was no dream. He spoke to me—my saint in heaven. He remembered his child.’

She turned suddenly upon Lucien.

‘I am the child’s mother. There is no one else to defend him. He has no one but me. Am I right?’

Into her eyes, into her attitude, as she bent a little towards him, she threw a force of passionate entreaty that staggered the singer of songs. It was the rush of spirit against spirit.

‘You are right,’ he said gravely.

‘Will you help me?’

She spoke as though enforcing a claim, yet graciously preferring the tone of one who asks a favour.

‘I will indeed.’

He raised the little hand to his lips, as if it were holy bread. He trembled in every limb.

She leant back for a moment, and her eyes closed. She rubbed them open again. She seemed to rub the brightness back.

‘They told me you were my worst enemy,’ she said.

‘I?’

‘Others think it strange that you are not. I knew you from the first.’

‘Ah!’ said Lucien. ‘I do not know who I am. I am your servant until I die.’

‘If you wished, you might make it impossible for my son to be King.’

She looked at him till he felt as if she saw, not his eyes, but something that shrank from her behind them.

‘What do you mean? I was a foundling; I have no parents,’ he said.

‘Are you sure of that?’

‘I do not care to know the name of my father. Whoever he was, he wronged my mother. If I have longed to see her face, that is human. I have wept over the misery that I caused her. I would never hurt women.’

‘It was a cruel woman that disowned you,’ said the little duchess, her eyes flashing.

‘She gave me life,’ said Lucien. ‘Some day I will give it back to her. I will make her famous.’

All at once the scene of the return of his manuscript became vivid. She would laugh—she must—she was bound to laugh. To his relief she took no heed of the words.

‘I think you are the bearer of a packet for me,’ she said, stretching out her hand.

Lucien had forgotten the charge altogether. He felt in his pockets, full of unreasoning fear. No—yes—it was there.

‘Someone has tampered with this,’ the duchess said. ‘It has been opened on the way. The silk is frayed—look!—and the paper has been folded twice.’

‘I was told to give it to colonel de Nacquart, and I did so. I am sure he never opened it.’

‘ You did not observe the difference when the packet was given back to you? ’

‘ No. ’

‘ What are your eyes for? You see many things that no one else can. When anybody might see, you are blind. ’

Lucien sat silent. He knew it was so.

‘ Perhaps, ’ he said, after a moment, ‘ Madame de Nacquart opened it—after she had put on the green veil? ’

The duchess looked up at him as she untied the silk, and smiled mischievously.

‘ Not so bad, ’ said she.

The packet contained a snuff-box of black horn. She raised the lid; a miniature was painted on the inside of it, representing a young man with gray eyes and somewhat heavy features.

‘ Do you see any likeness in this to anyone with whom you are acquainted? ’ She asked, holding it toward him.

‘ No. ’

She gave a little short, impatient sigh.

She drew from her waistcoat-pocket a tiny mirror in a frame of ivory.

‘ Take that in one hand and the snuff-box in the other. Look at the miniature first, then at the glass. ’

Lucien did so.

He started.

‘ Myself! ’ he said.

‘ The portrait is that of my late husband, Charles Ferdinand, duc de Berry. ’

Intent as Lucien was upon the painted face, the eyes of the duchess were yet more intent upon the face be-

fore her, but she could gather nothing from its expression.

'If that be true which mirror and miniature assert, you have a great inheritance,' she said, when at last he shut the lid down.

'No greater than I knew before, and no less.'

He was walking in some high dream. The marquis de Civrac—Blum—the city of Lyons—his hopes and dreams of fame—all these were gone. In the whole world there was no one but himself and the duchess.

'This is Nature's freak. It is not true.'

'But if it were——'

'I would deny it. I am only your servant. You have given me the whole world—and more,' he said, not knowing what he said.

'You know the marquis de Civrac?'

'He was my truest friend.'

'Was? He is not dead.'

'No; but our friendship is.'

'You are wrong there. You might as well say that his friendship for me was dead. You heard how he spoke to me at Morfontaine? He had to speak like that for fear you should guess. He apologized afterwards. Hush! let me tell you. He is one of the best friends I have, but he was against my coming; he did everything that he could to dissuade me. By a strange chance, I was driven to take refuge in his house. He hid me in the room on the upper floor, because no one but himself ever entered it. There was another room, at the end of the passage, where I was to sleep, but I found it was not quite ready. I had promised to go to bed at dinner-time when all the servants—except the butler, who knew—would be busy, and there was

no chance of meeting anyone in the passage. I had nothing to do while I waited, and I opened that box and read the poem. And then you came! That likeness—I could have killed you. I know what poets are. I said the thing I knew would hurt you most.'

'I wished that I had died before I heard it,' said Lucien, smiling.

'Ah!' she cried, 'can you forgive?'

He knelt at her feet.

'Do you know who it was that sent you to me?'

'No.'

'The marquis de Civrac. I told him you were like my saint. He had never noticed it.'

Lucien started up.

'Where is he?'

'I do not know. Not here. There was a letter from him with the snuff-box, when I opened it at la Preuille. He said that he had reason to connect it with your birth, but he gave no explanation, and he declared that you could give none. If I withdrew from a struggle which must end in bloodshed, nothing more would occur. If, on the other hand, I persisted, inquiries would be made which might divide the party of the Legitimists for ever.'

'I would rather live in ignorance for the rest of my life than ask a single question which might cause you uneasiness. If I had only known before!'

'I could not speak alone with you. There were too many watchful eyes at la Preuille. That is why I pretended that I had not received the packet. Tell me, do you know anything of the circumstances of your birth?'

Lucien told her the New Year's Eve tale, in which, that night, he hardly believed himself.

She shook her head.

'I can make nothing of this. It sounds like a mere mystification.'

'So I think.'

'And now you will return to Lyons?'

'Nothing shall drive me from your side.'

'We will leave the marquis to draw his own conclusions,' she said, with a gleam of mischief.

'I had no suspicion that it was he who sent me. I will write.'

'You cannot communicate with him at present. We do not know where he is. It would not be safe to send letters. My own belief is, that he will come himself. He is a loyal heart. He would give his life to prevent me from endangering mine; but when the first shot is fired, he will fly to us. He is no coward. Good-night, Monsieur Sylvestre. Here come the Grooms of the Chamber. My bed must be most beautifully made, Monsieur de Rezé. I have never had such strong housemaids. And now I come to think of it, you have taken nearly an hour.'

'You must forgive us, Madame,' de Monti said, bowing low. 'We have never made beds in our lives before. Every one of us had a different theory.'

CHAPTER XV

THE WANDERINGS OF THE LITTLE GENTLEMAN

‘HUSH!’ said de Monti, as Lucien came down the creaking rungs of the ladder. She is still asleep. She had a bad night.’

‘She is not ill?’

‘No; it was those brutes of cabbages. I wonder you did not hear them. We had to wake her.’

‘Why?’

‘Oh, a letter urging her to countermand the Order for the 24th.’

‘What is the Order for the 24th?’

‘Only an Order for all the Royalists in France to rise—that is all.’

‘Hurrah!’ cried Lucien, flinging up his cap.

‘Hurrah!’ cried René. ‘I always knew you were one of the true men. No cabbage, eh, de Monti? What answer did she send the villains?’

‘Simply these words: “*The Order for the 24th remains unchanged.*”’

‘Bravo! And we?’

‘We stay here. It is important for us to know that d’Autichamp has countersigned the Order before we meet those cabbages and confound them. He holds the left bank of the Loire. My uncle has sent the sacristan of Montbert to Nantes for letters.’

‘To Nantes? I wish I had known that he was going,’ said Lucien.

‘He will return to-night. You can see him then.’

In the kitchen Marie was preparing sour milk and sour bread for breakfast.

‘That little gentleman is not a gentleman at all; he is a lady, *hein?*’ she said shrewdly, peering up into Lucien’s face.

‘What makes you think he is a lady, Marie?’

Marie shrugged her shoulders and replied that she had eyes in her head—which statement being incontrovertible, Lucien made a lame remark to the effect that the little gentleman dressed like a gentleman.

‘He is, I think, a countess,’ Marie rejoined; and Lucien began to have a poor opinion of his gifts for conspiracy, and felt thankful to see de Charette enter.

By the end of the day Madame had recovered her strength and was merry as ever.

‘How good to think that we shall all sleep soundly the whole night through!’ she exclaimed, when they had finished supper.

‘Do not say so, Madame! You tempt Fate. Here comes our messenger.’

‘Bring him in,’ she cried, with a sudden assumption of dignity that sent Lucien flying from the kitchen turned Audience Chamber.

He waited anxiously, sitting on the lowest rung of the ladder, until de Monti half opened the door and beckoned to him.

‘A pretty affair, this!’ he said. ‘The sacristan has been arrested half a mile from Nantes. He may have had news of d’Autichamp.’

‘And all my clothes that he was bringing with him!’ cried Madame. ‘My riding-habit, my hat, my beauti-

ful white feathers—all my linen, too; I could cry!’ and she laughed instead.

‘He may have had letters,’ de Charette said gravely. ‘We must not stay here. I have taken counsel with Jean. He thinks we had better go to Chaimare. It is a desolate place enough. They are good people, well affected. I know farmer Deniaud. Can you be ready in ten minutes?’

‘In five!’ she said; and was as good as her word.

The owners of la Chaimare were asleep when they arrived, but the burly farmer recognised de Charette and his nephew at once, and asked no questions concerning the rest.

‘The little gentleman looks tired,’ said he. ‘I may as well sleep with the others in the outhouse. He will do me the honour of accepting my room. Nonsense, little gentleman! You are in my house. You must do as I say.’

She took his hands in both of hers.

‘No,’ she said; and again there was in her manner that quick, irresistible dignity. ‘Let no one be disturbed. I want a bundle of straw; that is all.’

The farmer led the way into an outhouse, divided only by a barrel and a rotten beam or two from his cattle-shed. The floor was covered with straw, and dry, except where the water oozed through holes in the roof.

The walk had been long and wet, and cries and gleaming signals had alarmed the little party more than once as they crossed the wide heath. The duchess flung herself down as if she could not stand a moment longer. The lantern light fell full on her white face.

‘Thank-you,’ she said. ‘I am so comfortable here. Now let me sleep.’

De Mesnard looked at his dripping cloak, then at his mistress.

‘No, thank-you,’ she said, with a weary little smile. ‘That would be to give the mother of Henri Cinq rheumatism for a blanket. Good-night. I am as happy as I can be. Let me sleep—oh, let me sleep!’

Was it her cry of weariness that kept Lucien waking half the night, as he tossed to and fro on the floor of the damp cattle-shed? She would never live through the dark, he fancied. When they came to look for her next day, she would be lying there cold and dead.

Here she began to mingle with remembrance of the beautiful dead girl in the village where his childhood passed.

‘But she is not beautiful,’ he said to himself.

Through his short, broken slumber he argued on and on with the marquis that she was not beautiful and not dead yet, and the marquis said she must be one or the other.

The turning of the stable door upon its rusty hinges woke him; the fresh air and the light rushed in together.

A dark, wild-looking girl stood on the threshold, the rosy sky behind her. He shut his eyes a moment, thanking God he was no longer in a dream. The milk fizzed down into the wooden pail. Presently the girl went out; and on the other side of the partition he heard a voice, clear and bright as the morning.

‘Ah, that is good of you! I should like a bowl of milk above all things. How sweet it is! how warm! I have slept well. Now let me sleep again.’

Lucien slept also till the sun was high in the heavens.

They dined that day in the cowshed, when they had moved the barrel into the centre for a table.

‘It is like the barn in “Redgauntlet,”’ Madame said. ‘We will have a dance here some day.’

‘Look!’ the farmer’s wife whispered, pointing out her guests to her three thin, solemn children. ‘These are the Owls.’

The children nodded, but said nothing.

‘You may trust them,’ said the farmer. ‘The babies of la Vendée have no tongues.’

‘Have they not?’ cried Madame; and in a few minutes one of them was seated on her knee, feeding her with green soup out of his porringer, while the other two were in hot dispute as to who should offer her the hunch of black bread, and the largest and brownest of new-laid eggs, boiled hard as a stone.

‘What a dear little gentleman that is!’ muttered the dark-eyed milkmaid to her father.

Lucien’s heart went out to her. He loved enthusiastically all people who loved Madame.

Towards evening Jacinth de la Roberie arrived from the ancient house of la Mouchetière, where he lived as his ancestors lived before him.

‘The name of pure devotion might be Jacinth de la Roberie,’ René declared. ‘Madame is our cause—yours and mine; but she is his religion.’

Lucien looked at the small gray man with jealous interest. A full crest of gray hair crowned a head not otherwise remarkable. He wore a short gray beard like a goat. The eyes were of a dull water gray, as if they had often wept.

He spoke of de Courson's magnificent Division—of Gaulier—of the perfect confidence of Cathelineau, a man worthy of the heroic name he bore.

'Do you bring us any news of the commander-in-chief on the left bank of the Loire?' the duchess asked, as they sat talking together.

'Alas, no, Madame!'

'It does not matter. I am sure of him—as sure as I am of you, my brave field marshal of the future.'

'As my fathers were, I am,' he said. 'If fidelity were all, your son would be upon the throne to-day, Madame.'

'To-day or to-morrow. What does it matter? The day after we shall think it was just the same. You have a little boy, I think?'

The father smiled.

'Ah!' she said. 'I must go to la Mouchetière; I should like to see him. I love all little fellows.'

'I wish we had news of d'Autichamp,' murmured de Monti.

CHAPTER XVI

TOO MANY MARQUISES

NEXT day, when they reached the estate known as le Magazin, a messenger rode in with the Order for the rising on the 24th, countersigned by the general on the left bank of the Loire.

‘I told you it would be so,’ Madame said. ‘Now we must meet those others; we shall have something to say to them.’

De Charette smiled pleasantly.

The abbé Pineau, prior of St. Etienne-de-Corcoué, dined that evening. To him, as to Jacinth de la Roberie, the sight of Madame was as the sight of an angel. He drew Lucien on to tell him little stories of her courage, her cheerfulness and kindness.

‘Ah!’ he said, with a sigh, ‘God has sent her to this distracted country. If we are but thought worthy to follow——’

‘*The silly romantic duchess of Berry and her absurd baby.*’

The words came across Lucien with a sense of trouble and shame, as though they had been blasphemous.

Half a mile back from the highroad stood their inn for that night, the desolate farm of le Meslier. In front a garden, free from rail or fence, rambled away to a great, straggling vineyard. Behind, a rickety

open staircase led from the huge barns on the upper story into a walled courtyard paved with mossy stone.

‘If you fed the hens on Indian corn, my good woman, you would have a more constant supply of eggs.’

Did Lucien dream these words in the morning, or was it a well-known voice that came up to him through the holes in the floor of the barn where he had slept? He could not think it was a dream; he was not given to dream about cocks and hens.

He dressed himself and ran down.

‘Can you tell me whether the marquis is here?’ he asked breathlessly of de Monti.

‘My dear Sylvestre, how do I know? Half a dozen marquises are about the place. You may take your choice. One arrived late last night, and went away a short time since, saying he would return. He did not give his name; to my mind he looked more like a marquis than the rest. Benjamin de Goyon is expected, and the marquis de Tinguy. The marquis de Goulaine has just come. Which marquis do you want?’

‘Thank-you,’ said Lucien. ‘I will wait for the one without a name. Where is your uncle?’

‘Gone to la Louvardière to confer with de la Roberie about the rising of the third army corps. (René has gone too.) He confided Madame to de Goulaine; but she is busy upstairs. Two days more! We have very little time.’

‘Two days—an eternity!’

‘We may all be dead in two days; it is as likely as not.’

‘*Likely* is a ridiculous word. If you have any sense in your head, it does not exist.’

Lucien ran away into the vineyard.

The thought of meeting the marquis again lay underneath his other thoughts all day, but he would not dwell on it. Once more the passion of solitude claimed everything; he longed to be alone as a thirsty man desires cold water. There was no room for any other wish. The curling tendrils of the vine charmed him, and his own fancy.

Now and then he took out 'Marion' and read a few words here—there—where the book chanced to open.

'Women are good,' he said to himself, 'all women.'

A small, merry angel with the features of Madame went flitting in and out of the tracery of stems and the stiff poles round which they twisted.

He saw her bend over a half-unfolded bud and kiss it.

She came towards him.

'What are you reading?' she said. 'Ah, "Marion de Lorme"! I do not like it. Marion was a bad woman. Mary Queen of Scots is the true heroine. Have you ever read "The Abbot"?''

'No, Madame.'

'We will read it together some day. Never speak to me about Marion.'

She was gone again.

Lucien smiled. This was what he had heard of women—that was the way they talked. Tender to all the world—cruel to each other; cruel, even then, only in word.

'Women are good,' he said again, 'all women. But I love ladies; I will write a poem in praise of noble ladies.'

The resolution welled up in him from a depth below words; it had the force of a deed.

The shadows of the leaves moved on across them; the black mark at the foot of every pole grew longer and longer.

‘What are you doing?’ said de Monti, on his way through the vineyard with Prévost de Saint-Marc, an hour or two later.

‘Drinking wine.’

Lucien pointed to the clusters of tiny hard green grapes.

‘The sun is making wine all round me. It is rising, rising from the darkness under the earth where the dead lie. It is streaming down from the old ball of fire that heated grape-juice for Solomon when he poured it into the Song of Songs, which is a song about women.’

‘Little sweetness you are like to get out of the vines of la Vendée,’ said de Monti, and pulled a wry mouth.

‘Sour grapes?’

‘Ay, I believe you.’

‘A thousand times, no!’ Lucien said, with an air of knowledge. ‘They must be gathered when the bloom is dewy on the full globes. They must be dried in the sun three days. They must be soaked in sea-water that hath lain thirty days in the dark, twenty days clear in a cedarn cask. A girl should pull them from their stems one by one.’

‘Were you a wine-merchant in some former state of existence?’

‘Perhaps. It is the way they make wine in Cos, anyhow.’

‘It is the way they do not make it in Montaigu, then, to judge by the result. Oh for a draught of good Bordeaux!’

‘Edouard!’ called the voice of the duchess.

‘How many secrets these grapes will force people to tell! The wit of Voltaire may be ripening here in the sun and the silence. Wine is laughter. The comfort of dying souls in the wine of the Sacrament also—wine is blood.’

‘Well, I have done with you,’ said De Monti. ‘You seem to me to be talking as much nonsense as if you were tipsy. I wish to goodness I knew what you had found to get tipsy on.’

‘Edouard!’ called the duchess again.

The repetition was disagreeable to Lucien. That she should ever have to ask for anything twice!

He had not been quite sincere in his discourse upon wine. The mention of Marion, and Madame’s disapproval of her, had reminded him of Corneille’s defender, of that man behind the green baize table; and he had been trying to talk as that man talked; it was thus that a poet should talk, he thought; but the effect upon de Monti was not remarkable.

‘Go! go!’ he said, with some impatience.

The weathercock veered round, the weather changed. A wind like the breath of an iceberg began to blow, and Lucien withdrew to the farmhouse, for he hated wind. As he leaned over the ruinous balustrade of the stair, watching the last gleam of a stormy sunset, the duchess called to him also.

‘Come in at once!’ she said. ‘Come to the parlour. It is bitterly cold. The fire will not burn, there is no light, but we must sit there. It is a Council of war that they insist on. De Goulaine, de Goyon and de Tinguay have come. De-la-Roche St. André is wax in their hands. They know de Charette is away, and

they are all against me. But we cannot go back now. Anything is possible, only not that. Come quickly; give me your support.'

On a rough table in the midst of the smoke a single candle burnt as if it had not any flame to spare, and yet resented what was left of daylight. At first Lucien could see no one, and he heard nothing except an outburst of cough.

'Ah! the hooting of the Owls!' he said to himself.

Slowly the wreaths of darkness curled away, and he made out Madame seated in the armchair, a bent figure by the mantelpiece, another opposite, and two smaller men in the recess of the window. They all appeared to him to resemble the birds after which they were named. He was tormented at this time of his life by the likeness of everything in nature to something else. The Owls blinked their grave eyes, but took no notice of him; they were busy with their own thoughts.

Whatever counsel they might wish to give, no one seemed anxious to begin. There was grave embarrassment in the silence of the men, and a certain malice, Lucien believed, in that of Madame. Never before had he seen her sit still so long. Thunder was in the air.

'Speak, my friends,' she said at last. 'Say what your conscience bids you say. Tell me the whole truth.'

No one responded.

The room was growing darker every moment. The travelling clouds over the vineyard went faster than before, driven by the wind. The duchess settled herself upon her chair, lifted her little head proudly.

‘You say nothing, gentlemen? You look surprised to see me? Yet all is ready. We take up arms on the night of the twenty-third. Everything is prepared. You were expecting me. I did not hesitate a moment.’

‘The presence of Your Royal Highness in these parts was a great surprise to us,’ said the elder Owl with slow deliberation. ‘I am very much afraid’—Lucien wondered whether he were ever going to finish the sentence—‘that we are not in a condition to move at present.’

‘I do not understand you!’ the duchess cried. ‘Whose doing was it that I came? More than thirty messengers, over a hundred and fifty letters, did I receive at Massa. Those letters were written by people whom you know well. I am told that the whole organization of the rising is complete, that you desire nothing except my presence. Very well, here I am. And now, gentlemen, you state that I am not expected, that nothing can be done. You, Monsieur de Goulaine, declare that you have not even two thousand men? You say it is impossible to raise ten thousand in two or three days? I am told that your Division is the most complete of all. I was assured that I might remain here in perfect security. I have been deceived, I suppose?’

De Goulaine flinched at the word, but he controlled himself and answered steadily:

‘Yes, Madame.’

There was a pause, as if he and she were straining at the opposite ends of a rope, the strength of one balanced by the strength of the other.

‘It is my duty to speak,’ de Goulaine continued. ‘I have a mere handful of men at my disposition. I

grieve that necessity should force me to say so, but I am convinced that everything you are advised to do will be harmful to the cause of your son. We are well affected about here, Madame; but unless we are powerfully reinforced, we have but a barren devotion to offer.'

'What, gentlemen!' cried the duchess. 'In the hour of her glory no single member of my family ever shared the perils of la Vendée; we have been justly reproached with that. I make no count of difficulties—I come—and for me you can do nothing?'

'It is time to tell you the truth, Madame,' put in de Goyon from the window. 'We have been assured over and over again in your name that la Vendée would only be called upon to arm in the event of Your Royal Highness' success in the Southern provinces—in the event of the proclamation of a Republic by the Parisians, or in case of foreign invasion along the frontier. All this we have repeated to our followers. Not one of us can do anything after the failure at Marseilles. Your Royal Highness is compelled to hide. Pursuit is organized against you. We cannot deceive our peasants. They are depressed and disheartened. The papers have it that you are a prisoner, and they believe this. In one word, Madame, they will not rise—we are sure of that.'

'Many of the leaders of la Vendée have come to me,' chimed in de Goulaine; 'in fact, they are with me now; they beg me to entreat you not to listen to those who counsel a rising.'

The pale cheeks of the little duchess glowed. Colour became her.

'The generals on the right and left banks of the Loire will do their duty, you may be sure of that!' she

said defiantly. 'I have this moment received a letter from monsieur de la Roche-Macé. He tells me that his Division will rise to a man.'

'For my own part, Madame,' said de Goulaine, who in his turn was growing warm, 'I am persuaded that the general on the left bank, count Charles d'Autichamp, will never give the order for the rising.'

'Are you sure of that?' said Madame; her eyes sparkled.

'We are certain,' the four men said together.

She drew from her pocket the Order signed by d'Autichamp the day before, and read:

' " MADAME,

" The general who has just arrived in la Vendée has transmitted the Order for a rising on the twenty-fourth of this month to all our faithful followers in the provinces of the West and South. Every royalist in France has been warned, and will act in consequence. By giving this Order to the corps that you command you will communicate to the brave people of la Vendée the confidence inspired in us by a Princess who has escaped, as if by miracle, the pursuit of her enemies. God has protected her; He will protect us also. We are about to fight for His holy cause."

With dumb rage Lucien saw that not one of the four men had changed countenance.

'Very unwise,' de Goulaine said. 'You bid me speak the truth, Madame. A rising at the present moment is impossible. It must be countermanded.'

The very forms of politeness were falling away. The words were few and earnest. They had come to close quarters at last.

'Too late!' she exclaimed; 'it would be quite impossible to warn the West in time. The farthest Divisions would be in arms; we should sacrifice them.'

Still no one of the four responded.

'When I was with you at la Grange four years ago, there was a night-lamp at my bedside, and round the rim was written: "Rest quietly. La Vendée watches." Has she fallen asleep?'

No response.

Madame sat up straight and stiff, and spoke in an altered tone:

'If your colleagues now at la Grange decline to march at the head of their Divisions, they must give me their refusal in writing, that de Charette may fill their places. I see too clearly, Monsieur de Goulaine, that I cannot count upon yours to defend me.'

He did not contradict her.

She looked round, utterly bewildered. Lucien would have thrown himself at her feet, but she turned to de Goulaine as if there were no one else present. Into her next words she thrust every power that she possessed.

'But you in person,' she went on—'you, the noble marquis, the Gentleman of the King's Bedchamber—will you be at my side in the day of peril?'

The appeal was so imperious that Lucien, startled though he was, could not resent it.

'I will, Madame.'

De Goulaine bowed low.

The other three echoed his words.

'The Council is dissolved,' she said, rising.

What was it that transformed her? She touched the ceiling as she stood.

CHAPTER XVII

DE CIVRAC TO THE RESCUE

THE four allies went out.

The chair that had been as the throne of a Queen was all too large now for the little shrunken figure that sank back into it. The fire still smouldered, the candle flared and guttered. Night had let down a curtain between the vines and the clouds.

‘They are all against me,’ she said.

‘God is for you, Madame.’

Lucien knelt at her feet, kissed her cold hand. The voice of the four men was nothing but air. Certain as the assurance of his nature that he would one day be famous was his persuasion that the duchess must win; but for his part he would have had her win with one adherent, nor was he at all desirous that she should win quickly.

‘Let them go,’ he said; ‘you are stronger without them.’

She shook her head—sighed.

There was a low tap at the door, and de Civrac came in.

He bowed to Madame, whom he had seen before, greeting Lucien with neither more nor less emotion than if he had just arrived at the *château* de Morfontaine. The boy sprang to his feet, blushed, blushed again in anger because he blushed.

‘I was not able to return earlier,’ said the marquis.

‘Permit me to suggest, Madame, that you should take some repose. Our friend here will tell me the result of the conference.’

‘You will be glad of it. You will be sorry for me. You will think me a fool. You will not leave me?’

She shook his hand.

‘No assurance is needed, I think, on that point.’

She glided from the room like a shadow; the marquis seated himself in the vacant arm-chair.

‘They told Her Royal Highness they had not men enough to fight, I suppose?’

‘They did.’

‘They urged her to countermand the rising?’

‘Yes.’

‘Which she refused to do?’

‘Naturally.’

A grave smile played over the face of the marquis.

‘Yet men are not less ready to fight in real life than they are in a book,’ he said; ‘they are only less ready to lead others to fight. By the way, have you written anything of late?’

The familiar question for which Lucien had often waited, and longed, in the old days!

‘No,’ he said, with a touch of joyous defiance; ‘but I have burnt “The Marionettes of Love.”’

‘Foolish boy! You cannot afford to throw away plots in that fashion. The plot was well contrived; by-and-by you would have cared to read it, if no one else did.’

They laughed together.

‘Can you tell me who wrote the Song that everyone in Lyons—man, woman, and child—was singing about three weeks ago?’

‘Oh yes; I did,’ Lucien said. ‘I forgot that. Besides, I never wrote—I only sang it.’

‘Indeed! I did not hear it, but I heard of it. You are coming on!’

A bevy of hopes cracked the shell, and flew, like downy fledgelings, in Lucien’s bosom.

He nodded.

‘The next poem I write will be much better,’ he said. ‘It has a better subject—the subject of noble ladies. How strange that I should meet you again here!’

‘Stranger things than that have happened, and will happen again,’ said the marquis. ‘Madame told you of my letter to her? Perfectly! I begged that you might not, on any account, be informed of it. There is no safer method of conveying a secret.’

‘But,’ said Lucien, much bewildered, ‘you said I was to return to you.’

The marquis rubbed the arm of the chair slowly.

‘You are young in the ways of the world, Lucien Sylvestre. So, for the matter of that, is Her Royal Highness; and she will never be older. But you, twenty years hence, may understand.’

‘You meant me to follow her?’

‘That is for you to find out,’ said the marquis.

Lucien frowned.

‘I have no time for all that,’ he said. ‘I want to write poems. I want to fight—to fight for Madame. I care about nothing else.’

The marquis put one leg comfortably over the other.

‘There will be no rising, however. Madame has refused de Goulaine, de Goyon, de Tinguy. Berryer will be here to-morrow; she will not refuse him.’

'Who is Berryer?' said Lucien, as who should say, 'Who is that mean hound?'

'The only man for whom the entire Assembly once rose to its feet.'

'It will need more to sweep Madame off hers.'

'We shall see. He came to this neighbourhood a month or two ago to defend some wretched labourers, who were accused of having given hospitality to the Owls. The man had not a chance. He spoke for half an hour. Judge, jury, witnesses—they were all speechless. A judge weeping! It beggars imagination. But that was Berryer.'

'If his last action was to deliver her adherents, I should have thought he was hardly the man to stop the duchess.'

'He is under the thumb of Chateaubriand. The Genius of Christianity has no desire to fight. He is "weary of everything, even of hope." He has no inclination for the office of "Plenipotentiary of Night, *chargé d'affaires* to the Shades." He "does not know how to be guilty of faith unless he is taken in the very act." Still, he is one of the Secret Committee now sitting in Paris. It appears to me that he prefers this to the battlefield. But all these phrases sound well. He has a magnificent style.'

'His style be hanged!' cried Lucien.

'My dear boy,' said the marquis, as he uncrossed his legs again, 'you do not see the importance of it. Heaven grant you a proper appreciation of style!'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POWER OF STYLE

THAT night Lucien could not sleep.

He would fain have asked many questions—have talked much longer; but the marquis had an unmistakable way of indicating when he had talked enough. Therefore Lucien wrapped himself in a cloak and sat out on a broken step of the stone staircase to watch the stars as they moved across the sky, never fast but unceasingly.

What did it mean?

Who was this hateful Berryer, who could do so much himself and yet was eager to abandon the whole enterprise because Chateaubriand, who had a magnificent style, was weary of all things, even of hope? Style governed the world, it appeared.

Would the duchess ever give in?

If she did, what would become of her?

What would become of him, Lucien?

But she would not give in.

How still it was! The wind had fallen. There was no murmur even among the branches. What was that? A shadow out of the shadow of the wall.

‘A fine night!’ said the marquis, glancing at the stars as he spoke. ‘They care very little up there who is King of this country;’ and he disappeared again.

Lucien began to wish he had gone in some time ago. He felt too cold and drowsy to stir now.

Presently a shadow—and then another shadow, very long and thin—was cast above the shadow of the little railed gateway.

‘The shadows all come first and the men after,’ Lucien said to himself dreamily. He was not asleep; yet the fragrant spring air and the starlight were folding him in dreams.

‘A plague upon it!’ said the voice of the elder Owl.

Was he really there?

Was he a dream?

Clumsy hands were fumbling with the stiff bolt.

Lucien sat still where he was, not inclined to help. What business had the fellow to return at this time of night?

The bolt slid back, however.

‘I will stay by the gate,’ said de Goyon. ‘She does not like me. Ask for her—you. Bring me word of her decision when you can.’

‘Who is that on the staircase?’ asked a voice of such strange clearness that Lucien wondered whether it would not wake Madame. Yet the speaker had not raised it.

‘I do not know. A farm-servant most likely. Ask him.’

The tall, thin man crossed the yard.

‘Can you tell me if Monsieur Charles lives here?’

As if the voice came breathing through an instrument of silver! The exquisite shades of sound in it so confused Lucien that it was a moment before he collected himself enough to answer:

‘No, sir.’

‘Oh, but I think he does!’ the silver voice continued.

'I wish I could tell you that he did,' said Lucien, laughing to free himself from an irresistible impulse to say whatever he was asked.

'I can do so, I believe.' The marquis emerged from the inky blackness of the porch.

'Monsieur Charles in the South is Petit-Pierre in the West. The little gentleman does not expect you, sir, but I am sure that he will wish to see you. Come in here first. You need food.'

'I need water still more,' said the guest, staring ruefully at his legs, which were splashed with mud up to the thigh.

The marquis led the way in. Lucien followed.

'We will not rouse the servants,' he said in a whisper, and briefly directed Lucien where to find meat and drink.

'Is there time?' said the stranger.

'How long an interview do you desire?'

'Half an hour.'

'When do you start again?'

'Before dawn.'

'You have time and to spare, then.'

'Good! I will take it before. Can you give me a basin of water and a towel?'

'I dare not. The stairs are old, and creak. She would hear. There is a pump in the yard.'

'That will do. Can de Goyon wait anywhere? He has had nothing to eat. He found me on his return, and brought me round by the swamp at the back that we might not make any noise. He is desperately afraid of the little gentleman. He is out there by the gate.'

'Fetch him in, Lucien. He can wait here.'

A fine courtier returned from the pump instead of the muddy fellow who went thither. Nature had cut this man in her chiselling mood, and, humouring Nature, he himself had taken care that his clothes should fit him.

De Goyon sank into the merest insignificance. Lucien served the two men, who ate with the eloquence of hunger, while the marquis sat by, his arms wreathed over one of his legs humped up on the other.

A pine torch stuck in a cleft beam, resting on the huge bars of the fireplace, lit up this midnight festival.

'Now,' said the stranger, when they had finished everything on the board, 'I will sleep. Call me an hour before dawn.'

He threw the cushion of the armchair on to the floor for a pillow, stretched his long limbs in front of the grate, which was empty save for a glimmering heap of ashes, and fell asleep in an instant.

'Napoleon had that power,' said the marquis pensively.

Lucien resumed his watch under the stars. How would the little duchess resist this man? But it was nothing to the stars whether she did or not.

A long, sleepy interval, and the marquis touched him on the shoulder.

'Knock at the door of the bedroom, Lucien. Say that Monsieur Berryer is here, that he comes from Paris, that he solicits an audience. There is no time to be lost.'

Lucien looked up at her window. All was dark.

'I know,' said the marquis. 'We have let her sleep as long as we could. She must be roused now.'

Lucien climbed the staircase reluctantly.

‘Ah, from Paris! Let him in, then.’

Madame was lying on a rough bed of white wood, covered with very fine sheets. She had thrown a red plaid shawl over her shoulders, to protect herself from the draughts, and she was wearing the head-dress of the country—a woollen cap, with long, falling lappets. On a table in the middle of the room a brace of pistols and numerous papers were strewn; on the chair beside her lay her peasant’s dress and the brown wig with which she was wont to cover her fair hair when she went out. A tallow dip threw shadows rather than light all around.

‘I bring with me a letter from Paris, Madame.’

‘Be so good as to read it.’

She settled herself against the pillow in an attitude of reflection. The cap became her as if it had been a crown.

Berryer sat down on the table. The marquis took the chair, Lucien a stool.

He understood passing little of the letter. Here and there he caught a phrase that sounded like something the marquis had said before—‘Plenipotentiary of Night, *chargé d'affaires* to the Shades’—but for the most part his ears alone drank in the silver voice, and he was busy reading Madame’s countenance. Every tint of colour had faded even from her lips. Just as he was about to spring forward the blood came rushing back, the dangerous flash of the eyes began.

At the end there was a momentary pause. Madame put out her hand for the letter, turned to the last page, held it up.

‘There is no signature.’

She glanced fiercely at Berryer.

'I am not the author of the letter, Madame. The Committee entrusted me with the task of delivering it to Your Royal Highness.'

'Anyone who can undertake such a task, sir, is quite capable of being the author. Return to those who sent you. Tell them that the Regent can pay no attention to an anonymous request.'

Berryer leant forward a little, as though to deprecate her wrath, but remained silent.

'If she would but let him go now!' thought Lucien.

He was right. Not to know when we are beaten may mean victory in the end; not to know we have won means certain defeat.

Unluckily there were two born orators in the room.

'My friends in Paris cannot be aware of the state of the country,' she went on, with growing eagerness. 'They hear of it only from people who are opposed to the movement. Believe me, Monsieur Berryer, people a hundred miles off are not in a position to decide on the proper moment for a rising. The result of the earlier war would have been very different, if Paris had not always insisted on directing the provinces of the West.'

'It may be so, Madame.'

Berryer raised his head.

'The example of the duke, my husband, is ever before my eyes. If, in the year '15, he had consulted only his bravery and the greater number of his friends—if, in one word, he had placed himself at the head of la Vendée instead of listening to those false counselors who surround all princes—much sorrow would have been spared, miserable divisions among the lead-

ers would never have occurred, and France would not have been invaded a second time. Say that I go—I go, and I will not return; for I will not return with foreigners. They are biding their time—you know that very well—the time is at hand. They will come and ask for my son—not that they care much more for him than they did for Louis-Philippe nineteen years ago—but it will be a pretext for them to gain a footing in Paris. Well, they shall not have my son! They shall not have him for all the wealth in the world. I would rather carry him off to the mountains of Calabria. What would France have to pay for a third invasion? The partition of France, without a doubt. I am a Frenchwoman. My very blood rebels at that thought.’

She covered her burning face with her hands.

‘I give you my word,’ she said, as she looked up again, ‘my son shall never reign if he has to buy the throne of France by giving up one province—one fortress—one house—one cottage like the cottage in which the Regent of France is receiving you at this moment.’

‘It is for that reason, Madame, that all who wish well to Henri Cinq deprecate any attempt at this moment. So long as your influence remains intact we are safe to win France—the whole of France—in the end. It wanes every day that you linger.’

‘I cannot, I will not, go. My enemies would say I was a mere adventuress; they would be right.’

‘That is not the name by which your enemies, or your friends, call you, Madame. Nevertheless, in the long-run you cannot escape the troops.’

‘The troops of Louis-Philippe are scattered,’ she

said. 'The peasants will be able to master them easily, isolated as they are at the different farms. No, nothing can shake my decision. My cause is just. I refer it to God.'

'You are right, Madame; it is impossible that you should go,' said the silver voice, without an instant's hesitation.

Had Lucien heard aright? He could scarcely believe his ears.

'To stay here will annihilate your party,' Berryer continued. 'What of that? You, Madame, will be safe. In you the hope of the Royalists will survive.'

She turned her head away.

'It is impossible that you should go. Louis-Philippe declared as much.'

Her eyes were fixed upon the speaker.

'When someone told him that you had left the coasts of France, "Impossible!" said he.'

'Why?' asked the duchess, a flame of fury lighting up the words.

'The wish fathered the thought, Madame.'

'*He* wish me to stay!' she cried.

'That you should stay is, very properly from that point of view, his most earnest desire. He knows the Legitimists will not fight. I saw de Bourmont as I came through Nantes. He has issued a counter-order to every chief of every Division throughout la Vendée.'

'He has not dared?'

'You know his hand, Madame?'

She looked at the piece of paper that Berryer held up, as if she could not take in the sense.

'Louis-Philippe will hear of this. He has spies

everywhere. He knows that, however long the Regent may remain in hiding among the peasants, she must be taken at last. Then, what a chance for him to show his royal clemency! Put her to death? Oh no! Keep her in prison? Oh no! He will release her to the tune of the plaudits of Europe. He will show how firmly his throne is founded on the love of his people. She harm him after that? Never! Even she herself must feel grateful to such a magnanimous conqueror.'

There was a pause.

'Where shall I embark?' said the duchess.

Lucien sat aghast. Something impossible seemed to him to have happened. The marquis betrayed no surprise, nor did Berryer.

'Off the coast of Brittany, Madame. A boat lies in readiness. Sorin, the miller, is taking some sacks of flour to Nantes—if you did not object to go hidden among them? I myself will meet you at le Magazin in three hours' time.'

'I cannot read,' she said, brushing her hand across her eyes.

She tore the paper in two.

'At le Magazin, then? Farewell, sir.'

Lucien delayed a little outside the door. He heard her hurrying to and fro, up and down, hither and thither like a caged animal, distracted.

Unable to bear it longer, he ran down after the others.

'Poor lady!' the silver voice was saying. 'She has stuff enough in her head and her heart to make twenty Kings. Walter Scott is the real culprit. He ought to be hung!'

'Style again!' said the marquis.

CHAPTER XIX

JEANNE BECOMES A POSTMAN

HEROES and heroines are, after all, not uncommon; but it is a question whether, if they always knew beforehand the price to be paid for heroism, there would be quite so many. Often, as she sat by herself in dull emptiness, Mademoiselle Jeanne was tempted to wish that she had not delivered that message to Lucien. He might have gone even had she refused; but then he might not. Threatening rumours were abroad, hints of red trouble to come. If he would but return!

Blum, anxious and annoyed himself, wrought her anxiety still higher. She said no word to keep him back when he informed her that Lucien, by the agency of the marquis, had become involved in a Royalist plot, and announced that he meant to rescue the victim. It seemed to her that he had lost the influence which he once possessed; in her heart she wondered not so much that he had lost as that he ever gained it. Still, if he could bring back Lucien, well and good! If not, other means must be tried. She had not bargained for war when she sent him off.

About this time she received an order for a large piece of Church embroidery, from a convent in the neighbourhood of the town of Nantes. If she chose to execute it, she would have to go thither in the course of a few days, that she might do so under the superintendence of the nuns of the Visitation. They

had not room for her in the convent, but they undertook to find a lodging and to pay her well. She did not hesitate to accept this offer.

Nantes! That was the address which the marquis had given her.

The Legitimists were known to be gathering round Nantes.

Mademoiselle Jeanne was not imaginative, but she was able, as the vulgar say, to put two and two together. Two and two made four in her reckoning, not forty nor four hundred as with the fanciful.

Blum often marvelled at her correctness from this point of view. Her power to calculate had the force of intuition. Lucien, whose intuitions came fast enough, never paid any heed to it, but Blum had proved the wisdom of the oracle again and again.

Thus, on his return to Lyons, Jeanne was the first person whose aid he sought. There were factors in his experience which would, if rightly added up, afford a valuable result; he felt sure of that; but he was not strong in mental arithmetic.

She received him with greater cordiality than usual; she welcomed him with all her heart, as she would have welcomed any beggar who could give her news from the West. He did not know—how could he?—that perfect candour may be more deceptive than guile.

He told her how, with some difficulty, he had traced Lucien to la Preuille; how he had not been allowed inside the house, though a large company seemed to be gathered there. He narrated at great length all the arguments he had used—the arguments which must have induced any reasonable man to return. ‘And then I said’ followed ‘And then I said’ many

times. It was only too evident that Lucien had not returned.

'And *then*,' said Jeanne at last, in a voice that led the way onward, 'you were interrupted?'

A very intelligent lady, whose knowledge of his opinions was astonishing, carried him off, and set him down at the principal inn of Bressuire. He could not deny that he had enjoyed the drive; she entered into all his ideas. They walked in the garden of the inn together, so that he might develop them to the fullest extent. Towards the middle of the afternoon she left him to take some rest, advising him, before he followed her example, to go and talk to a gardener who was cutting cabbages at some little distance.

'You never can tell where you may make a convert,' said she. 'You talk so well and so convincingly that you have only to be heard to be believed.'

In accordance with her desire, he had talked long and convincingly to the gardener, and he believed that he made a convert, for in the end the man had nothing to say. As he was retracing his steps, a small bright object shone on the path before him. He picked it up; it was a silver pencil-case, such as a lady uses.

'I believe you have one yourself, Mademoiselle Jeanne?'

'Yes, yes; go on!'

He meant to return it to the lady, but she had departed. The people at the inn affected complete ignorance. Yes, she had been there, sure enough. She rested her horses, that was all; and she was gone. Whither? Who could say? She employed her own coachman; she left no message. They had never done any business for her; her name was unknown.

‘You kept the pencil-case?’ Jeanne said.

‘Here it is. I can make nothing of it.’

‘There are initials.’

‘Are there? I never saw them.’

‘“M. C.”’

‘Well, what of that?’

‘“M. C.”—Marie-Caroline. You were driving with the duchess of Berry.’

Blum pondered her words for a moment.

‘The cunning cat!’ said he. ‘She never could have cared about the tariff. Her politics are altogether opposed to law and order and material progress. Why, she must have been deceiving me the whole time!’

Jeanne thought it probable, but did not say so.

‘I shall reveal the plot to Thiers at once; he is the only man. She must be apprehended; she is a desperate woman, prepared to deluge France with blood.’

‘After all,’ Jeanne said, ‘these may not be her initials. They may stand for Marthe-Charlotte, you know.’

Blum shook his head.

‘It is known that she is about in those parts.’

‘What was the lady like?’

‘Oh, just like any other woman!’

Jeanne longed to shake him.

‘Why have men got eyes?’ she said.

‘To see with,’ said Blum.

Irony was lost on him, as on all people who are sincere. He could not see, because he saw only *en bloc*; and Lucien could not see, because he saw only in detail. Jeanne and the duchess were not made like that.

'I shall start for Paris to-morrow morning. I must warn the editor of the *Glaneuse* first. If the Government can but find, can but arrest her, we shall have stopped a war, and Lucien will be saved for the one cause worthy of him.'

The words that Blum had spoken were true; for once his oracle agreed with him, except as to the cause for which Lucien was to be preserved. To that, as to all causes, she was profoundly indifferent; but she feared and hated the thought of war as of some huge, incalculable extravagance which might cost her dear. That Lucien should be the Flying Mercury between Legitimists with sounding titles seemed to her a chivalrous arrangement; but she had no desire that chivalry should lead him to fight. So long as the duchess of Berry wrote, plotted, schemed for her son, Jeanne was on her side: she would have done the same herself in like circumstances; but the spectacle of any woman who could stir up men to wound and kill each other, for any cause whatever, raised all her instincts of revolt. Men were enough inclined to violence by nature, she thought. If she could not make peace between them, the woman's part must be to war with words. Actual warfare was merely a horrible game of hazard, in which the best man was as like to fall as the worst.

Therefore, whatever might be Lucien's view of the matter, she did not regret that she had helped Blum—if she had helped him—to hunt down the duchess. The shortest way to end strife was to strengthen the hands of those who were strong, not those of the weak. She did not like Blum's account of all the armed men he had met.

A day or two after, he came in to say that Thiers had seen him—was led by collateral evidence to believe that the initials on the pencil-case were those of the duchess—and had set his spies to work accordingly.

She did not mention her work at Nantes until, one evening, he came to her with a clouded brow.

‘I have heard from Thiers’ agent,’ said he. ‘There is no trace of the duchess anywhere; they have lost every clue. He is terribly afraid that she may have escaped.’

‘The best thing that could happen. Let her go, and we shall have peace.’

‘You are wrong; she is a mere firebrand. In a year we shall have the same trouble over again. It is impossible to watch every mile of the coast; and yet she must be stopped at all hazards.’

‘Her followers will never betray her.’

‘No; but she might betray herself.’

‘How?’

‘She might insist on remaining in France against their wishes. If she did, we must find her in the end.’

‘She is not likely to insist on staying now, is she? You yourself told me she would be beaten at every point.’

‘The agent says it is by no means certain that the insurrection has failed in the South. One of the spies intercepted a letter yesterday. If it could be conveyed to the duchess, he is sure that she would not endeavour to leave the country. She will not go while there is a chance of success left.’

‘What a pity he intercepted it, then!’ said Jeanne dryly.

Blum did not understand.

‘That is just what I say. Why could he not let well alone? These agents are so stupid. Now, nothing will serve him but that I must take it. I cannot leave my work again.’

‘Why does he want you to go?’

‘Because he can trust me. Because I am acquainted with the country, having just returned. Because I know Lucien by sight, and if I could find him and give him the letter, it would reach the duchess; they are in close communication, it seems. Thiers would pay all expenses. But I cannot go. I should lose my place.’

‘Where is the letter?’ ‘Monsieur Bernard, Care of Monsieur Clémenceau, advocate, Nantes.’ What a simple address!’

‘She was known by the name of Bernard in the South. They will recognise it.’

‘I think,’ said Jeanne, still keeping possession of the envelope, ‘that I had better go. I have to visit Nantes on business of my own. I can take this on the way.’

‘You do not mean it?’

‘Indeed I do. You will give me directions. I shall not be missed here as you would be. Trust me, I will not fail.’

‘I have every confidence in you.’

Jeanne smiled. She scarcely heard what he said, but she was smiling to her own thought.

‘Here are the notes,’ he said. ‘I think you will find them sufficient. If not, you can apply for more.’

No; Jeanne did not like the look of the notes, and he could not persuade her to take them. She refrained from suggesting what was quite clear to her—that the letter must be a fabrication. If Blum were simple-hearted enough to think it genuine, why should she

undeceive him? But she could not accept secret-service money; and she had not determined whether to play this card or no. The missive seemed to her dangerous, and she was resolved to get it into her own hands—that was all, so far.

Blum, however, clung to the principle of 'fair work, fair wages.' If Jeanne became the postman, the postman's wages she should earn. Skilfully she avoided argument, always letting him feel that he got the better of her, always keeping tight hold of the envelope.

'As you say,' she observed, when he stopped for lack of breath, 'I can easily send for the money, later on. It would be a mere encumbrance to-morrow.'

She gave a sigh of weariness when he went upstairs to his room. Why did he need so many explanations? Why did he not know what she had known for the last three months—that her will was always his in the end?

Next morning she went to the Church of the Cordeliers; knelt a reasonable time in prayer; offered a candle at the shrine of St. Julian Hospitator, patron of travellers (she liked to think that he was also the patron of travelling minstrels); and returned home to pack her modest luggage.

The baby was at play in the window opposite. She kissed her hand to it before she left; it smiled and kissed a little fat hand in return. Jeanne sighed, and sudden tears stood in her eyes.

CHAPTER XX

A LETTER FROM TOULON

ON the morning after Berryer's departure, as Lucien was leaning against the wall of the courtyard, half asleep in the sun after many a restless hour, something fell suddenly out of space, as it seemed, at his feet, and a hoarse voice said:

'Give that to Monsieur Bernard.'

No voice could have been more unlike the silver accents of the night before.

'Where are you?'

He sprang up—looked round—could see no one.

Quick as thought he pulled a loose brick out of the wall and scrambled to the top. No one was to be seen on the further side.

'Where are you?'

There was no answer.

He jumped down—he ransacked the little copse adjoining. He broke the song of a thrush as it swung on a hawthorn bough; but not a trace of any human being could he find; and he returned to the courtyard.

There on a mossy stone lay the letter, and on it was written in large, stiff characters: 'Monsieur Bernard, Care of Monsieur Clémenceau, advocate, Nantes.'

The postmark was *Toulon*.

It came, then, from the South. Who was Monsieur Bernard?

The same person as Monsieur Charles most likely—the same person as Petit-Pierre. He felt a strong re-

luctance to deliver it. Another treacherous general—a new defection of troops. Must he stab her again? It was all over. She was going. What more could they want? What business had anyone to trouble her now?

He wished the marquis were at home; but the marquis had gone with Berryer and de Charette to await Madame at le Magazin. De Monti and the other two were still absent.

What if the letter meant nothing at all? Should he destroy it?

What if it came as a warning? The troops of Louis-Philippe were in the neighbourhood. She might be in imminent danger.

Nearer and nearer to the house the letter drove him in this dumb struggle. Still undecided, he crossed the threshold.

In the parlour sat the Regent.

He started when he saw her. Was it possible that a few hours could have made such a difference? Her face was worn, haggard. Her lightless eyes wandered over the vineyard, vacant of expression as if she were blind. Her hands lay idle in her lap; she did not hear him as he came.

Whatever it might contain, the letter could not make things worse. Perhaps——

Alas! that man should be always a gambler even in his truest instincts!

He laid it on her knee.

‘*Monsieur Bernard?*’ she said, with languid interest. ‘That is not for me. I cannot open it. *Bernard? Bernard?*’

She passed her hand across her forehead, trying with pain to recollect. All at once——

'Yes!' she said. 'I was called *Bernard* down in the South for a day or two. It seems long ago. But I remember now.'

'It comes from the South, Madame. The postmark is *Toulon*.'

She opened the letter with slow, listless hands.

'No,' she said, 'it is nothing. Look! "Monsieur Georges Rod begs to thank Monsieur Clémenceau for his kind condolences on the occasion of the death of Madame Georges Rod, senior."'

She tossed it into the fire; but the next moment she snatched it back. Her countenance changed like lightning. There stood the duchess once again.

'No, no!' she cried. 'I will not go. Read!'

The warmth of the fire had rendered visible a sentence written between the lines, '*The South is in flames*.'

To Lucien it was as if a thunderbolt of fact had fallen into the midst of the world of vision in which he lived. He saw fair homesteads burning—mills, like the old mill where his childhood had been passed—he heard the screams of women. Yet in the eyes of the woman before him there burnt a fire of joy and triumph.

'We cannot, cannot let those lovely provinces be destroyed. La Vendée must make a diversion.'

She seated herself at the table and wrote rapidly.

'Take this to de Charette,' she said. 'There is a note inside for Berryer, another for de Bourmont. The miller is starting at once; he will guide you. But I shall stay—I shall stay. Oh, thank God, I shall stay! You have given me back my life, Lucien Sylvestre; you have given back France to my son.'

Had she no doubt at all? Yet he seemed to himself as a heretic when he ventured to ask her, if she knew who wrote the letter.

‘Oh no!’ she said. ‘It came like a miracle. It is a miracle—just when I thought that all was lost. Thank God! Thank God and Saint Anne!’

Fast, fast as he could go, Lucien raced to le Magazin, trying to outrun thought.

Berryer, yellow with fear, stood at the door; three others behind him.

‘Where is she?’ he whispered breathlessly.

‘She has not come.’

He fell back with a cry.

‘Where is Monsieur de Charette?’

De Charette seized the note, tore it open, and read, Berryer and the marquis reading over his shoulder.

‘MESLIER,

‘*May 23.*

‘DEAR CHARETTE,

‘I remain among you; I am writing to tell Berryer of my resolve. The other letter is for the marshal. His orders are to come to me immediately.

‘I remain because my presence here has compromised a number of my faithful servants. It would be cowardly in me to abandon them. Besides, I hope that, in spite of the unfortunate counter-order, God will give us the victory.

‘Farewell, dear friend. Do not resign your post; Petit-Pierre will not resign his.’

The orator bit his bloodless lips.

‘She is a cruel woman.’

‘Permit me to observe, sir,’ cried Lucien, joyfully losing all self-control, ‘that whoever speaks in that way of Her Royal Highness is a traitor.’

The cry relieved him. In the tumult of his breast one only thought rode clear—detestation of anyone who could put into words his own flash of horror.

Berryer shrugged his shoulders, and a look from the marquis made Lucien feel as if he were four years old. The other men gathered round the table, their heads bowed, their hands clenched.

‘This cannot be all,’ said de Charette. ‘Go on, Sylvestre! What has she heard?’

‘A letter was thrown over the wall, addressed to Monsieur Bernard. I could not find the messenger. The postmark is *Toulon*. There was but one sentence that meant anything, “The South is in flames.”’

‘And that meant nothing,’ observed the marquis. ‘I heard from a friend in Toulon yesterday. All is quiet there.’

‘You may be wrong, sir,’ said de Charette.

‘I may be,’ said the marquis, not much as if he thought so.

‘Any way, the die is cast now. We must fight.’

‘I shall return to Paris,’ Berryer said. His voice had lost the silver-bell tone; it rang sharp like an instrument out of tune.

For a minute no one else spoke.

‘I shall go back to le Meslier,’ said de Charette; ‘she cannot be left alone. Edouard, you will oblige me by taking this note to de Bourmont at Nantes. I doubt his being able to leave the town. Madame does not calculate ways and means.’

‘Nor anything else,’ Berryer muttered between his

teeth. 'As you love the cause, persuade her to fly. She must be taken if she stays.'

'I agree with you,' said de Charette, 'unless—it is just a chance—unless there should be any truth in this rumour about the South.'

They held a hurried consultation.

'It is a plot of the Reds to catch her.'

'If she insists on believing——'

'We shall never be able to induce her to fly now.'

'There are spies all round.'

'What do you advise?' said de Charette to the marquis, who had remained silent.

As usual, there was a tendency to consult the one person who showed no wish to be a counsellor.

'She had better stay where she is for the present. They must have some idea of her whereabouts, or they would not have sent this to le Meslier. They think one of two things—either that she will go to the South, or that she will disbelieve the report and fly to the coast.'

'Right!' said de Charette, after a moment's reflection. 'She must stop at le Meslier.'

'In a day or two it may be safer for her to go to Jacinth de la Roberie at the Wolf's Den—or at la Mouchetière. He has a famous hiding-place there.'

'De Bourmont will be obliged to come, and we shall see what he says. She may listen to him.'

De Civrac shook his head. He did not see much chance for the marshal when the Chrysostom of the Law Courts had failed.

'Depend upon it, we shall fight,' he said quietly. '*Ce que femme veut*—you know the rest of the quotation.'

CHAPTER XXI

CÉLINE

EULALIE DE KERSABIEC, a daughter of one of Madame's most devoted adherents, arrived at le Meslier shortly after their return. She was of the same height as Madame, a brunette, with dark, sparkling eyes, light-hearted, adventurous. It was considered that she might personate the duchess in an emergency. Petit-Paul they christened her; and Madame would amuse herself dressing up her friend as a boy, and declare that Eulalie looked the part better than she did. The marquis was appealed to on the point.

'Either lady would make her fortune,' he said, 'at the Comédie-Française.'

Lucien noted with surprise that Madame was not at all cast down to find that she had been deceived about the South.

'The message was providential all the same,' said she. 'It saved me from going, and now everyone agrees that it is best for me to stay. We are quit of Berryer too. He has gone back to the Plenipotentiary of the Shades of Night, I suppose.'

De Bourmont arrived from Nantes on the Friday, and stayed a day and a night. Madame was disinclined at first to forgive him the counter-order, but one of her sunny disposition could not harbour malice; and when she heard that Berryer had visited Nantes before he came to le Meslier, she grew more lenient. Perhaps

she was not sorry to find that Berryer had outwitted somebody else. The counsels of de Bourmont were very different now.

Far from persuading her to fly, the marshal encouraged her to remain. He had seen too many vicissitudes to think anything impossible.

At last there was but one subject of dispute between them. She was determined that the rising should take place on Friday, June 1, the day appointed for it in Paris; while he was equally resolved that it should be on Sunday, June 3, when the peasants would be gathered together in the churches to hear Mass, and no suspicion would attach to their movements. In the end he convinced her, and she yielded the point. Neither of them knew as yet the disastrous results of the counter-order.

Many a story the old marshal told Lucien, basking among the vines, or sitting long at table after a slender meal, of the old days in la Vendée, when he had been the last man to lay down his arms. Madame would come and listen, too, while he spoke of the years that he spent in prison for making an infernal machine of which he had never heard; of the hole pierced in the cell, and the cord swung over the ramparts of Besançon; of the murderous cold in Russia; of the battle of Lützen; of the wild fighting in Africa.

'Ah!' he said, 'Cardinal Ximenes could not get rid of the pirates, nor the Knights of Rhodes, nor Charles V., nor le Roi Soleil, nor the great men of England—but I did. And there I left my son—my second son out of the four who went with me. He was the only officer killed. He was about your age,' he added, turning to Lucien.

‘How well he died!’ said Lucien gently; and the old father nodded.

‘All the world says,’ cried Madame, ‘that if you had been in Paris two years ago, my child would never have left it.’

‘They say truly, Madame. At any rate, he would have left it over my dead body; and I am tough.’

He sighed, still thinking of his boy’s grave at Staouëli.

‘Have you warned de la Roberie that the rising has been put off for two days?’ asked the marquis.

‘No,’ said Madame; ‘I will see to it.’

She spoke as if she did not hear. In her hand was a letter. Her eyes brightened as she read, and they grew soft, but she said nothing of the contents.

The envelope, which she had torn off, lay on the table. It came from Sicily.

Lucien, who did not observe such little incidents, noticed this because the marquis looked long at it.

‘You will not forget?’ he said to her after a while.

‘Oh no.’

Next morning he left, ostensibly that he might inquire into the affairs of Monsieur Clémenceau; while the marshal returned to the right bank of the Loire to direct the movements of the troops for seizing Angers and Nantes.

Madame had intended to leave le Meslier for the Wolf’s Den on May 29, but when it came to the point she had an odd reluctance to go, and showed it, not in open opposition, but by every excuse that she could think of to stave off the dreaded moment. At length de Charette insisted. He had remarked suspicious characters lurking in the neighbourhood. The first

of June was at hand. It could not be safe to wait longer.

They got silently to horse about midnight. Madame kissed her hand to the vines.

A cloud of depression settled down upon the little band. Lucien did not wonder whether the rest felt as he did; he knew it. The very horses walked slowly, with downcast heads.

They had not gone far from le Meslier when Madame was thrown. Quick to recollect her forebodings, he thought she was killed. She was not even hurt, but thereafter he rode as if the darkness were full of hidden enemies, as if every tree on the road, every insignificant stream they forded threatened her life.

Confidence returned with the first streak of gray dawn. Given that he had the light for him, he could protect her against the world.

About an hour before sunrise they reached an old mill.

All mills, whether of wind or water, belong to the same family. Lucien's heart went out to this one as to the old home which had sheltered him in the days of boyhood.

'De la Roberie and the younger Jacinth were to be here,' said de Charette anxiously. 'There is not a sign of them.'

He put his hands over his mouth and raised the hoarse cry of the owl, but no one responded.

'I never knew him fail before. Is it possible that Your Royal Highness's messenger did not reach him, that he still thinks the rising is for to-day?'

'I did not send,' said Madame; 'I forgot.'

The colour flushed her cheeks. She looked ashamed

and conscience-stricken, like a naughty child found out. Lucien could have forgiven her anything; so, it seemed, could de Charette.

‘You had much on your mind,’ said he.

‘Yet,’ he remarked aside to Lucien later on, ‘it is odd; she used not to forget.’

‘She had received a letter from Sicily, and she was thinking of it all day. I noticed that she scarcely spoke to us.’

De Charette reflected for a minute or two, then shook his head.

‘No, I do not understand. It cannot be helped. We dare not go to the Wolf’s Den now, in full daylight, without the master. I can find my way to the house of his brother-in-law. We had best seek shelter there; they will know his movements. He may wish to receive us at la Mouchetière, where he and his family live.’

De Charette was right. Jacinth himself was still absent, but the two elder daughters came at once on receipt of a message from their uncle; and Madame was persuaded to change clothes with Luce, who remained behind, and to return with Pauline, Lucien taking another road, that the village people might observe nothing. His mind worked with unnatural clearness, as the mind will when a certain stage of weariness is over after a fast of many hours’ duration.

The sun was going westward as they turned in at a high iron gateway, rusty with age. Stone pillars, wreathed in ivy, guarded it on either side, one of them surmounted by a fox with a broken nose, who sat upon his hind-legs, holding a battered shield. Within, the grass grew long and rank—it had not been mown for

years; tall buttercups were springing everywhere. In front was a tangled bed of rose-bushes, covered with buds; the blossom on their boughs weighed down the may-trees over it. The house looked as if it were woven of ivy; stone was hardly visible except where the topmost gables cut the sky. The oaken door, deep-set within the porch, studded with nails, was rotten; the dust lay thick on latticed windows, and iron bars held crumbling mullions together. Under the black crown of a clump of Scotch firs, whose trunks were ruddy with sunset, the rich light of evening poured in upon the diamonds of glass and set them all aflame. Over and through the undergrowth Lucien caught a glimpse of the fair locks of a little boy—of the streaming brown hair of a girl whose petticoats flew out to the wind. The pair swung to and fro, now high among the boughs, now almost on the ground, singing lustily as they rose and fell.

‘What are they singing?’ said the duchess; and she paused with her hand on the gate.

Clear and distinct over the golden air came the children’s voices, accenting every word with gleeful vigour:

‘Death is gone a-riding
Where many riders be.
Not a man is hiding,
Never a man would flee.
Pale his horse to look upon,
Pale is he!’

‘A Song they sing in Lyons,’ Pauline said. ‘My brother brought it home to us.’

‘How cheerful they are!’ said the duchess; and she broke off with a sigh.

The children had caught sight of them. The swinging and the singing ceased in the middle of a line, and they ran up to their elder sister. The girl was about fifteen, but looked younger.

'Well!' she cried. 'Have you seen the duchess? What is she like? Is she pretty?'

'You have seen her too,' said the duchess, putting her arm round the girl's neck. 'What do you think? Is she pretty? No—not at all!' and she looked down mischievously into the depths of the soft hazel eyes upturned to hers.

'Céline, Céline! when will you learn discretion?' cried the elder one.

'Nay—I will have my answer!' the duchess insisted. 'She is not pretty, is she?'

Céline flushed crimson over cheek and brow.

'I thought you were my sister Luce. Luce is very pretty,' she said.

The duchess laughed, and let her go.

'You shall be one of my Maids of Honour by-and-by, and teach my courtiers to speak the truth—will you, little one?'

Céline clasped the hand of her Princess and covered it with kisses, half passionate, half devout. She was trembling.

'I will go and tell grandmamma,' she said, almost in a whisper. 'We never thought that you would come. We never dreamt of anything so beautiful;' and she glided in under the dark porch.

'Me, too!' shouted the boy.

Madame yielded her other hand to him with a smile.

'How old are you, my fine fellow?'

‘I shall be twelve next May, and then I shall fight for the King.’

‘Ah, he is just eleven!’ murmured the duchess; and her clear bright eyes grew dim for an instant as she gazed far away across the sea at her boy in Scotland.

In the porch Céline reappeared, leading a frail old white-haired lady, who seemed afraid of the sound of her own voice, and even more afraid to remain silent. She was Jacinth de la Roberie’s mother, she said. His wife—she sighed—was long since dead. Her son had been very anxious. The whole night he and her grandson had waited at the mill; they thought there must have been an accident. Would not Madame come in? The house—everything in it—everyone in it—was at her service. Céline would take her to her room. Pauline would attend to her.

‘There is bad news to-night,’ she added tremulously. ‘Monsieur de Villiers, who is with us, only just escaped arrest when he went out. A band of *gendarmes* pursued him. Thanks to a swift horse, he escaped. But he is a very foolish young man. As soon as he saw that he was safe, he shouted, “*Vive Henri Cinq!*”’

‘Brave fellow!’ cried Madame.

The old lady shook her head.

‘They will find out that he came from this house; and my son is already suspected.’

There was a note of piteous appeal in her voice.

Monsieur de la Roberie came through the gate at that moment.

‘I cannot even try to express in words my joy at beholding Your Royal Highness under this unworthy

roof,' he cried, the wild-fire of enthusiasm kindling his mournful features.

'Papa,' cried Céline, 'Her Royal Highness has told me that I shall be her Maid of Honour.'

'Great glory for you, my child!'

He stroked her hair fondly.

'But I shall be the King's page,' said the boy.

'Did you hear anything more, Jacinth?' asked his mother.

'Yes. There is a very unusual movement going on in the cantonments. The suspicions of the troops are aroused. One patrol I saw outside the gates. We must be prepared.'

'I knew it,' said she, turning away.

'Your Royal Highness will forgive?' said De la Roberie. 'My mother is old. She has had many sorrows in life. She is as devoted as we are; she would give everything for the cause. My eldest son would have hastened to pay his respects to you, but he is out watching the Reds.'

'You left him alone?' cried the grandmother.

'A brave man never is alone,' said de la Roberie.

Céline took Lucien to his room, and pointed out with pride a peacock, his tail displayed, parading on the lawn below.

'I cannot think what is the matter with that cherry-tree,' she said, leaning out of the window. 'I did not notice it just now, when I went to cut a bough for Madame. All the blossom is outside, and there are no flowers in the centre. Do you see?'

'Like the bride in the old ballad of "The Mistletoebough"—nothing but a white veil and her bones,' Lucien said; and they both laughed.

‘Or like a beautiful lady with no heart—that would be worse. You are like me. You have days of thinking everything is like everything else.’

‘I never saw anything like you.’

‘You will, then. There is somebody just like me in a picture downstairs. She died when she was fifteen. I hope I’ll not die. There is somebody just like Loulou too. Sometimes we play at being pictures, and then we hardly know which is which, do we, Loulou?’

‘Yes, we do,’ said Loulou. ‘I am always me.’

But when he saw the whole family assembled round the table at supper, under the still row of their ancestors, Lucien held that Céline was right in her contention. The same clear pale brow, the same eyes—hazel or water-gray—the same sensitive lips. One after another the grandmother told the tradition connected with each—how this one had fallen in battle, that one had died young, and that one, again, had disappeared, no one knew how, and these had shed their blood in the old wars of la Vendée. The story might be different, the end was always the same—as, indeed, it is in all stories.

‘Will she die too?’

Lucien looked from the young face to the face that had been young a hundred years ago, and never aged. He could not think of death and of this girl together. He remembered the portrait that Madame had shown him.

‘I, too, am but a living picture.’

‘I wish Jacinth had come back,’ said Céline, after supper. ‘It is so dark, and the Reds are about. And grandmother loves us all, but she loves the boys best. And I never feel safe without Jacinth.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Loulou. ‘You have me to take care of you.’

They went to rest early, for Petit-Pierre was tired and Petit-Paul was indisposed. It was decided that she must remain at la Mouchetière in any case, as she could not be fit to travel.

For the first time in his life Lucien found out that sleep loves not the overweary. He could not control his room. So long as daylight lasted it was quiet. Up to within an hour of midnight it was quiet, though restless. Then, just when every other room was hushed, this room began to make noises. It creaked, it breathed. Someone tramped about in the wall. Sometimes there were wires through it, and the wind played on them. He felt as if he were a stretched wire, his nerves vibrating at every sound.

There was a cupboard by the fireplace, the door of which was always opening of itself silently—unlike the other door, which never ceased to rattle, though it was closed. The window did not fit, and rattled also. Except the dumb door, opening on to blackness, however often he shut it, the only noiseless piece of furniture was the portrait of an old young gentleman over the mantelshelf, his hand on the hilt of a sword. Like all the well-bred pictures of his day, he sank back into the wall as if a hole had been cut in it.

The bed had a tester of faded blue. The curtains shook out dream after dream, and they went flying forth, but only if Lucien kept his eyes open—to let his eyelids fall was nightmare. The fire never blazed for more than a minute; do what he would, it burnt low, and the heaped-up coals crumbled.

In vain he reasoned with himself. Reason for fear

there is none anywhere in a true man; and yet no reason avails against it. Lucien feared he knew not what, but he feared slavishly, as in the days when he was a child.

At length he rose, dressed himself, unbarred the shutter, and threw open the window.

Down below, under the cherry-tree, what was that? A ghost?

Was it the girl in the picture, revisiting her maiden haunts?

No, there was Loulou—there was someone else.

Céline looked up and beckoned him to come.

Before he had lit his candle she was at the door, breathless.

‘Jacinth is here. The Reds may be here any moment. They want to put Madame into the hole. She cannot—cannot hide there. She would die. Come down, come down and save her!’

There in the hall stood the old young gentleman of the picture, leaning against the table as if he could hardly stand, his hand on the hilt of his sword. Madame stood beside him. Loulou had perched himself upon a cabinet, his eyes round with wonder and excitement. The grandmother was weeping.

‘My son has been out all night,’ said de la Roberie in answer to a question. ‘The Reds are patrolling close by. We may expect a visit any moment.’

‘Show me the hiding-place,’ Madame said.

‘She cannot, cannot!’ whispered Céline, clutching Lucien’s arm.

Her father took the lamp and led the way down a long dark passage into a kitchen at the back.

‘Where is it?’

‘There, under that heap of potatoes.’

With the help of his son—Madame holding the lamp—he cleared them hastily away. Breathlessly they heaved up the great stone that lay underneath, and Madame bent over; but the light illumined only her haggard countenance. Two or three steps went down into the darkness. A mouldy smell of stone came up. Something crawled out.

‘There is just room for Your Royal Highness,’ de la Roberie said. ‘We can make it appear as if the stone had never been lifted.’

Madame turned deadly pale; her eyes glared in their terror. Lucien held his breath. Céline’s fingers tightened on his arm. Everyone kept silence. Even de la Roberie dared not urge her.

A full moment of suspense, and she shook her head.

‘I will go,’ she whispered.

The grandmother, who was standing behind, clasped her hands together. Neither by word nor look did Madame betray that she had seen, but Lucien felt sure of it.

‘Are you able to walk a few miles before day-break?’

‘Yes, yes; I have slept well.’

‘Then I will take you at once to Stephen’s Mill, where you can rest until nightfall. When the moon is up, we will ford the river and go on to la Brosse. Madame Redoi lives there.’

‘Has she a son?’

‘No,’ said de la Roberie, looking surprised.

‘Agreed! agreed!’

‘Could Your Royal Highness put on wooden shoes—like a country woman?’

'Alas, I cannot! I have tried before. They hurt me too much.'

'No matter,' said Céline. 'We can send one of the peasants to rub out the footmarks.'

Madame ran upstairs to fetch her cloak.

'Unbar the outer door, child!'

Céline, who had let in her brother at the back, obeyed.

A chill breeze was stirring the leaves and the white buds on the rosebush. The stars had begun to fade.

'Oh, I wish I could come too!' she cried wistfully, gazing out into the dark. 'How soon, how soon she will be gone! Perhaps I shall never see her again.'

Lucien stood shy and silent. The wild, beautiful eyes, the ring of the breaking voice, startled him as if he had heard his own voice uttering thoughts not to be uttered. In the dim light Madame came down the staircase.

'Give me a kiss, little one, and kiss my Henri's page for me. Do not forget.'

The girl flung herself down on the ground, seized Madame's cloak, raised it to her lips, burst into sudden tears and fled.

Madame gazed after her with a curious expression.

'To think all that will be a man's in a year or two!' she murmured.

The words jarred on Lucien, and he made no response.

They had walked some way when Madame turned to him, raising her mouth as if she tasted the keen air, drawing it in with long breaths of delight.

'I could not do it, could I? I could not stay. Dead first and buried afterwards. But—to be buried first!'

Her companion understood that she was talking to herself, not to him, and did not answer.

‘If the troops had come—if they had killed the people of the house——’

Her quiet tones fell on Lucien like flakes of snow. Could she speak of it thus? But she was right, of course.

‘If they had made the servants drunk——’ She paused, then added slowly: ‘I should have been forgotten down there. I never could have lifted that great stone.’

Lucien shuddered.

‘It might have happened very well; but I would rather—much rather be shot. That old mother, too, how frightened she was! And they were all so fond of each other! I could not bear it.’

They walked on for some time in silence, de la Roberie far ahead out of earshot.

‘Do you know the real reason why I could not stay?’ she said suddenly.

‘You feared to compromise them?’

‘No,’ she cried; ‘I feared that girl. I dared not look at her. She loves her own people. By-and-by she will love some man who loves her, and be happy. I might have been as she is now. I am not. The man who first made a woman Queen deserves to burn in hell!’

Lucien was not able to add one thing to another like Jeanne. Where inspiration failed he was defenceless and rather stupid. He could not even conjecture what she meant.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ROBBERS' OAK

'FAREWELL, Madame! I must return. My son will be at your command,' said de la Roberie as they came within sight of Stephen's Mill. 'Heaven bless you and keep you safe!'

'And you, my friend.'

He turned sadly away.

'I do not know how it is, I feel as if that man were marked out for misfortune. I am glad he is not coming further with us,' she said.

Several Royalists were gathered together at the Mill, René le Romain and Prévost de Saint-Marc among them. Their faces boded no good.

No one knew what had happened. The counter-order had not reached all the chiefs in time. The worst was to be feared.

In the course of the day de Monti arrived, with two younger friends of the cause.

The others crowded round them.

'Well?'

'All is lost!'

'A little vague that,' said René le Romain. 'Come to details. In the Romantic School everything depends upon details.'

'At Bressuire our forces were crushed at once, and at Deux-Sèvres.'

'"*There is a world elsewhere.*"'

'Who said that?'

'Shakespeare. He's all the rage in Paris now. Hugo swears there is nobody like him.'

'Outside France there is no world for a Frenchman. He must have been a fool.'

'Once we are at peace again, I shall challenge you. Go on.'

'The counter-order did not reach Brittany and Poitou in time. The people rose, but they were overwhelmed by numbers.'

'Not de Courson's Division? Impossible!'

'There were two obstinate fights, after which they dispersed. He is badly wounded.'

'Briant was with him?'

'It was he who cried out "I am a dead man, but long live Henri Cinq!" as he fell. Then he called for a priest. The Abbé Laisis, chaplain of the Division, took him on his shoulders, confessing him as he went. When they were hard pressed by the Reds, he put him down, seized his gun, shot one, wounded another, took up his burden again and went on. The confession was finished; and Briant died in peace.'

'I will never laugh at a priest again,' said René le Romain.

'But Clouet—Clouet?'

'Clouet was very ill when he received the counter-order, but he started at once to take it to Gaulier. As soon as he came up, he heard the rattle of musketry—the firing had begun. He rushed into the thick of it, and would have fallen, he was so weak, but that Gaulier, with fifteen men, protected him. They kept in check a column of four to five hundred for five hours at a stretch. They reached Saint-Charles without

the loss of a single trooper, but they could do no more.'

'And Cathelineau?' asked Madame.

'Dead. Shot by the Blues five days ago. They found him in a hayloft where he was hiding with Moricet and another friend. The farmer—old *père* Guinehut—kept eight hundred pounds of powder there—there was lead too—and there were moulds for casting balls—any number of printed proclamations, also, though he did not know how to read himself. His son gave warning, and the three gentlemen were all under the floor of the hayloft by the time a detachment of the 29th of the Line came up.

"Look here, *père* Guinehut," said they, "you're a capital fellow. You don't want the war to go on and on without rhyme or reason. Own up! You know you're sheltering more than one of the old leaders."

"If you think they're in my house, look for them," said *père* Guinehut.

'So they did. They looked high—they looked low—they found nothing. They were going away at last, when, as ill-luck would have it, one of them spied a copy of the *Quotidienne*, which had been left about in a corner when the three gentlemen jumped up from their dinner to hide.'

'Well?'

'Peasants do not take in the papers, as a rule.'

'Exactly. It was, "Oh ho, *père* Guinehut! This is more communicative than you are."

"Papers are not forbidden, sir. I suppose I may have a paper like the rest of the world?"

"Oh, it is your paper, is it? Read us the news, then."

'They caught him out there—he could not read. The search began over again. He was obliged to walk in front, and open every door. At last they came to the hayloft. He saw at once that there was a bit of straw sticking up through the trap, moved to the side, put his foot on it. Nothing was to be found.

"Well, you old Owl you!" said the officer in command, out of all patience, "you have laughed at His Majesty's troops for the last time. Show us where these men are, or we will shoot you and set fire to the loft. There will not be much left of you or your farm either in an hour or two."

'Our old friend, madame de la Paumelière, told me the rest in Guinehut's own words.

"I said to myself, The farm is not mine. Have I the right to let it be burnt when I could stop the thing? But then I answered, My master is a Royalist. If he were here, he would do like me. Besides, when they have killed me, they will be satisfied, and perhaps they will not burn the house after all. So I said:

"Gentlemen, you command here. Shoot me whenever you will.'

"They made me kneel down—they knocked out one of my front teeth here—the musket was at my lips—all that, a few steps from the trap-door. The gentlemen below heard everything. Unhappily, they risked their lives.

"Do not fire.'

"Up went the trap-door, and there they were, all three of them.

"The soldiers were taken by surprise.

"Shoot the Owls!' cried their officer; but they

were in no hurry to obey. He seized a musket and fired on the one nearest to him—monsieur de Cathelineau—who fell dead. The soldiers cried out.”’

‘What of the other two?’

‘They were taken prisoners. They were driven into Cholet in the same cart with the dead body.’

‘And that very day the secret papers were found by Dermoncourt’s men in the wine-bottles in the cellar at la Charlière.’

‘What—all?’ said the duchess, putting her hands to her head.

‘All, Madame.’

‘The last blow to my hopes! Oh, my boy, my boy, you will never know!’

She turned away.

‘Achille Guibourg is in the Prison Neuve at Nantes. He was caught early next morning. Dermoncourt vows he will shoot him.’

‘This bloodshed must be stopped at any cost,’ she cried, with feverish decision. ‘Is it impossible to get the counter-order out?’

‘Too late, Madame. The position is desperate. All that remains for you to do is to gain the coast and to fly.’

‘I tell you, I will not!’ she said proudly. ‘I dismiss the first man who mentions the word *flight* to me. I am going to la Brosse. Is everything ready?’

‘A boat will be in waiting for Your Royal Highness by ten o’clock,’ said the younger Jacinth. ‘The moon is nearly at the full to-night. I have sent word to the guides to meet us on the further bank.’

‘If Your Royal Highness will take my advice,’ said de Charette, ‘you will rest while you can.’

She included them all in one sweeping bow and left the room.

‘Indomitable!’

It was de Charette who spoke.

‘She is not like other women. I have never in my life seen her cry.’

‘This is the first day that I have not heard her laugh.’

‘If she cannot teach us to win, she can teach us to die,’ said René.

‘Die? Not she! She will not die till she is ninety.’

‘Joan of Arc was made of stuff like this—Blanche of Castille—Maria Theresa. She will rescue us in the end.’

‘One thing is certain,’ said René le Romain. ‘I follow her to Paris or to heaven, and I do not know that I care which.’

‘We have nothing to do with our ultimate destination just now, sir,’ said de Charette. ‘That is a matter beyond generalship. Meantime we must make our dispositions. I am told that a number of picked men are assembling at la Pénissière. I desire that you will let me know within the next hour, whether you desire to join that contingent or to remain with me. We shall cross the Boulogne together, and then divide forces. I have some arrangements to make. Farewell for the present.’

‘What is this force at la Pénissière?’ said Lucien. ‘We never heard of it before.’

‘I shall go,’ said René le Romain. ‘I am tired of this idle life. De Charette cannot leave Madame; he will not bring on an action while she is in the neighbourhood. There is nothing for it but to die—and

we may as well see something first. La Pénissière for my money!’

‘For mine, too!’ said Lucien. ‘I will go with you.’

At last he saw the flash of swords within reach of him. He thirsted for the moment of the fight—for the moment after when he should sing of it.

‘I wish that I could accompany you,’ said de Monti, ‘but I am pledged. “Never make a promise,” my glorious old father used to say; “but if you make it, never break it.”’

‘De Mesnard will not leave Madame, and Jacinth de la Roberie is under a solemn vow to his father never to quit her side. There are only two, then, for la Pénissière.’

The river was flowing crystal smooth in glassy loveliness that night when the four younger men rowed across the boat that held the fortunes of France. Madame sat in the bow. She had loosened her fur mantle, for it was warm; she leant over the edge, trailing her white hand in the water. Now and then a light breeze rippled the surface and shook the water-stars into a snaky chain of fire. The air was full of the scent of lilac. The nightingales were calling to each other from distant groves.

‘Ah!’ she whispered as they drew to land, ‘why could it not go on like that for ever?’

She looked wan and tired in the moonlight.

‘It is not far to the Robbers’ Oak, Madame. The guides will meet us there,’ said Jacinth.

One guide was to take Madame to la Brosse, while the other conducted her guard to Montbert.

But when they reached the Robbers’ Oak, the guides had not come.

'Let me lie down for a few minutes. We are early; they will not be here yet.'

De Monti set upon the grass the little portmanteau which held her clothes and papers, and disposed a cloak over it.

'That will make a beautiful pillow!'

In a moment her head was resting there, and she had fallen asleep. The gnarled branches of the ancient tree covered her with a network of shadow.

'There sleeps the last Queen of France!'

Who said it Lucien did not know.

'Oh, if she could but sleep till we had all died, and wake to find herself Queen indeed!'

This also was only a voice of the night.

'It is the old place of execution. Many a thief, as he looked his last on the moon from these boughs, must have cursed her ancestors.'

'Hush! perhaps that is why she is asleep to-night underneath them.'

'Some people would say that we are thieves ourselves.'

'Stealing her child's kingdom for her—dying that this tree may be called his?'

'Why not? It is a cause like another. Her conscience is good, at any rate. Look how she sleeps!'

'*The duchess of Berry and her absurd baby.*' Again Blum's words recurred to Lucien.

Far away in dreary, crowded Lyons, Blum was toiling for an army of labourers who had no inheritance, not so much as an hour in the twenty-four of which they could say, 'That is mine!' It was the end of this hard, ungrudged, and unrewarded labour that Blum called 'the cause.' As he breathed the sweet smell of

the woods, deep thankfulness possessed Lucien that he had found another. Yet pity stirred within him for those poor people who had loved his Song.

He murmured over the words of one of Béranger's, which had haunted him ever since he heard it sung about the streets two years ago:

' Ils penseront à notre peine,
Et l'orage enfin dissipé,
Ils reviendront sur le vieux chêne
Que tant de fois il a frappé.'

René took up the cue:

' Pour prédire au vallon fertile
Des beaux jours alors plus constants,
Les oiseaux que l'hiver exile
Reviendront avec le printemps.'

Presently, on all fours, the guides came stealing through the thicket. The crackle of the bushes awoke Madame, and she sat up.

' Let us confess, gentlemen, that we look much more like a band of robbers than like the honest folk we are!'

Her merry laugh rang clear and fresh through the forest.

Old de Mesnard put up a warning finger, but the rest were in no mood to check her.

' Well, I suppose there is not a moment to spare. To me, my followers! What! only three?'

' Edouard and I are bound for Montbert, Your Royal Highness.'

' Is it even so? Farewell! Farewell, Edouard! And you, Monsieur le Romain, are reinforcing la Pénissière? *You* are not going to leave me?'

Her voice changed as Lucien fell on one knee and kissed her hand.

‘Do not go! Why will you go?’

‘To return, Madame!’

Her hand shook. She turned aside. To him alone she said no word of parting. He walked away quickly, outstriding René le Romain.

‘Look! look!’ his comrade called after him.

Looking back he saw the little figure in the full light of the moon, erect upon a fallen elm, and heard her cry:

‘Courage, my friends! Courage! courage! And hope!’

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SILVER KEY

IN thin, fine rain, three days later, Lucien and his friend arrived at the *château* de la Pénissière. A mist was rising. Only the upper boughs of the trees appeared, hung in the air, it seemed, having no root nor stem on earth. The house was without foundation. They saw the gabled roofs of the long irregular upper story, and the tower of the Chapel and the topmost angle of a great barn which formed the wings.

‘Here is the churchyard!’ said Le Romain.

‘Where?’

‘Why, the *château*, of course! We shall all be flat on our backs there to-morrow.’

‘It is better than growing old.’

‘Certainly. I never could see the use of old people myself.’

‘I like old women,’ said Lucien, thinking of his nurse.

‘Extraordinary man! But you like young women, too, I suppose?’

‘No.’

No—no—and no, he said to himself again. Madame was not young. Mademoiselle Jeanne did not count; she was ‘Mademoiselle Jeanne.’

The first person whom he met on the threshold was the marquis.

‘You are surprised to see me?’ said the marquis.
‘But I was born in la Vendée.’

He seemed to think this fact explained his conduct.

‘Why did you leave the Regent?’ he went on.

‘Sir,’ said Lucien, ‘my friend here, monsieur le Romain, told me that the general was determined not to fight anywhere in her neighbourhood.’

The marquis frowned, and smiled.

‘Ah, well!’ he said, ‘I have been young myself. Your poetry will be none the worse because you have seen a few shots fired.’

‘I hope to fire a few myself, sir.’

‘It is a curious thing,’ said the marquis, ‘but I have never known a man of letters who was a good marksman. You will probably shoot me by mistake. Not that it matters. Æschylus did not win the Battle of Marathon, but it is a good thing for the world that Æschylus was there. You will find an excellent collection of books in the armoury at the other end of the passage—small but choice. I advise you to study Epitaphs.’

Not till he found himself once more in a room the walls of which were lined with books did Lucien recollect how long he had gone without them. Feverishly, as a famished man eats, he fell upon them, and devoured now this, now that, unwitting how they tasted, conscious only that here was food at last.

Rows of tall old brown volumes in straight, severe, dusty lines stood ordered in their cases from floor to ceiling, divided by Oriental knives, rapiers, daggers, swords, pistols, coats of mail. The silver gleam of steel relieved the mossy drab of ancient binding. The curved grace of the scimitar, circling this way and that,

played like a crescent moon between the rigid stiffness of one bookshelf and the next. The light those yellow folios drank was given out again from the boss of a shield, from the spike of a helmet. The flickering beauty of weapons wrought by the dark hands of the East, the fine edge rippled in imitation of Nature's craft of wave and flame, the flash of eyes, ruby and sapphire, the tiny round of turquoise blue let in to rest the human eye, wearied with brightness—all these dazzled Lucien with a sense of the wonder of warfare. He had been living among trees and flowers, no songs but those of birds in his ear. Now there awoke in him the chant of battle, the cry love hears in death, death in love.

Above his head, hung a pair of russet iron gauntlets, the word '*Amor*' engraved upon their fluted cuffs. Who and what was the man who carried that word into mortal combat four hundred years ago? A prince among his fellows, no doubt; one who thought, like the duchess, that the ends of love were served by fire, famine and slaughter.

On the saddle close by, decorated with polished stag's horn, was depicted a woman holding a long scarf with this inscription:

'I am here, I know not how.
I go hence, I know not whither.
Welladay! with my will thou art never forgotten.'

A man held the other end, and spoke thus:

'I go, I stay! The longer I stay
The fiercer is madness.
Thine for ever, thy betrothed the world over!'

Again on the woman's side:

'But if the war should end?'

And on the man's:

'I rejoice to be there, there always.'

Below, upon the panel of a cinquedia, stood this:

'God and Nature have made nothing in vain.'

Nothing in vain! Long since the swan, whose perfect breast the armourer copied for his headpiece, had floated down the river to die, long since had died artificer and warrior and the high prince they served.

Not in vain!

Mindful of boyhood, Lucien took down a manuscript, an old copy of Froissart, illuminated by a patient, careful monk, whose peaceful heart rejoiced in the embroidery of war. He opened on a little glowing picture of blue, gold and crimson, wherein two banners were displayed, one covered with lions and fleur-de-lis, one bearing the cross on a white ground. Over against them a man mounted on a skeleton of a horse, bent forward, till he was half deformed by eagerness, the forefinger of his right hand on the thumb of his left, was speaking with persuasive vehemence. Underneath Lucien read:

'What have we deserved, or why should we be kept thus in bondage? We be all come from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve: whereby can they say or show that they be greater lords than we be?'

It was Blum, Charles Blum of Lyons, who preached out of the mouth of the 'foolish priest' in the great

chronicler. Blum and the 'foolish priest' were wrong, were deadly in their error. Yet for an instant Madame had seemed to be at one with them, in that strange cry of hers against the man who first made Kings and Queens.

Outside people were tramping to and fro in the passage, clattering up and down the stairs, filling the little bedrooms as rabbits fill a warren. Fresh arrivals every minute, servants lighting fires, bringing bread and cheese and beer, quarrels, differences, altercations—peace wherever the marquis happened to be, battle and confusion everywhere else. A motley company was gathering at la Pénissière in its master's absence. Le Romain, who came at length to call Lucien to supper, brought word of it.

'A strange crew, and no mistake!' said he. 'Picked men! What could the general have been thinking of? There are three officers of the Royal Guard, it is true, and two of the Line, and there are three trumpets of the Voltigeurs—they have half deafened me already; but as for the rest——'

'Who are they?'

'Ancient peasants that sailed with Noah in the Ark, I should think; boys who left college about three weeks ago; beggars come in for shelter from the rain. I cannot imagine what the marquis is about, receiving every one of them as if he were a prince.'

'A prince has only two arms and two legs. I should back the beggar to win, if it came to a hand-to-hand tussle. Is there no one else?'

'Oh yes. Eugène de Girardin is here and his three brothers, Fourré and two of his, Joulin and his father, Aubert, Aucler, Guinefolle, de Chevreuse——'

'I do not know them,' said Lucien, smiling. 'Count me among the beggars!'

'Not while you look so like a prince, my friend! When first I saw you I trembled for the duchess. These chance resemblances are very odd; but there is nothing in it, I suppose?'

'Nothing in life!' said Lucien.

'Come!'

'The rain has cleared off, it is a glorious evening!' said the marquis when they had finished supper. 'There is a target and a good range on the bowling-green. Who will hit me this white cockade? What say you, gentlemen? Is it a bargain? We will drink the winner's health in champagne.'

Loud cries of approval greeted the suggestion.

They ransacked the armoury. Pistols of various sizes and ages were produced. The white cockade was pinned to the centre of the target. The range was quickly found, and the competitors formed up in file.

'Sound trumpets!' cried the marquis; and the contest began.

No one, however, hit the mark. It was the waning light, said some. It was the white dazzle of the ribbon, said others. The marquis was busily inscribing in his notebook the names of those who had done best.

'Here, take my pistol, Sylvestre!' cried René. 'It is your turn now.'

'I?' said Lucien. 'I never shot anything in my life.'

He had paid little attention to the game. He was happy to feel his chill hands touched by the long, slanting rays of the sun, to breathe the clear, washed air, to catch the glitter of raindrops on leaf and spray. Nevertheless, he took the pistol,

'Hold it straight!' cried René.

Lucien did as he was told, aimed slowly, steadily. The white cockade fell from the target.

A burst of frantic applause hailed the achievement.

'Hulloa!' cried René, 'you keep your accomplishments dark, young man!'

The marquis smiled.

'I did not know that you could shoot, Sylvestre.'

'I was unaware of it myself, sir, until two minutes ago; it was pure accident.'

The hero who discredits himself puts the finishing touch on his popularity. Lucien's comrades hoisted him shoulder-high and bore him in triumph back to the *château*, where he drank his champagne standing on a table, and delivered a speech on the favours of Fortune. He found himself the marvel of the evening. Shouts of delighted laughter interrupted him every moment.

'It appears that he can speak as well as shoot,' said the marquis. 'I suppose that is an accident also.'

'Bravo!' cried René le Romain when he had done. 'This is only a rehearsal, Sylvestre. We will encore it the night that Henri Cinq is crowned.'

'Long live Henri Cinq! Long live the Regent!' shouted Lucien, the rest shouting after him till they were hoarse.

'To think that forty-two men can make such a noise!' said the marquis, unstopping his ears when it was over. 'I should have said there were eighty, at least.'

'There are only thirty-nine men, sir,' said René; 'but there are three trumpeters. You forget that.'

'You made as much din as thirty trumpeters in your own person,' said Lucien.

‘Well, I am glad I did,’ said René. ‘We shall be quiet enough this time to-morrow night, some of us. Do you think I shall see you again in the other world, Lucien?’

‘Why not?’

‘I do not know; you are better than I am. I wish there were a priest here; I should like to confess.’

‘I absolve you.’

Lucien did not say it lightly.

‘Ah, but you do not know! If you had lived in Paris—— Lucien, if I am killed, will you promise me one thing?’

‘Anything in the world, dear friend.’

‘It is this: Will you go to Victor Hugo—go to him the night his new play comes out, when all the flatterers have done—and say to him, “René le Romain is dead, and on his tombstone are these words: ‘Here lies one who believed in Victor Hugo’”? I have had the tombstone cut in marble; it is all ready.’

Lucien smiled.

‘I will do your errand,’ he said.

The world was wonderful that night. The coming near of the unseen was welcome to him always. He did not for an instant believe that René would fall. René was of the earth, earthly and red-faced; a dear good fellow as ever lived; a little tiresome now and then about Victor Hugo.

‘You are not the kind of man who dies young, René. You are the kind of man who lives to be a hundred.’

‘Well,’ said René, laughing, ‘if I do not fulfil my destiny, remember to fulfil yours.’

‘What is it?’

‘To live—to live more than a hundred years.’

Lucien made no answer.

His friend’s words echoed and re-echoed in him like the voices of the people in the streets of Lyons two months before. He would have done anything for René le Romain.

The others had gone out whilst they were talking. The house was still; the very stillness of it was musical with praise.

Only the marquis remained, sitting at the end of the table, a long way off, drawing a plan of the house with a pair of compasses and a pencil.

‘Fifteen windows,’ he said, as though to himself—
‘fifteen windows in front.’

‘You seem to be making preparations for a siege, sir,’ said René. ‘Permit me to say that I have never, even in the War Office, beheld a plan more beautifully drawn to scale. Look here, Lucien!’

‘It is no news to me that the marquis can do anything and everything,’ said Lucien.

De Civrac took no notice. He went on filling in a staircase.

‘I thought we were to go to Cugan to-morrow morning to disarm the National Guard.’

‘Maybe,’ said the marquis, with the utmost indifference.

‘I shall go and clean my pistols, I think.’

The marquis made no motion, either to encourage or to restrain; Lucien was full of his own immortal works; and René left them in search of gayer companions.

‘That young man talks too much,’ said the marquis.

‘He is an excellent young man, but he makes my head

ache. Sit down, Lucien. The sooner you get it out of your head that you are going to disarm the National Guard to-morrow, the better. Louis-Philippe's troops are in great strength all round us. They will never permit us to leave this place alive—as a body, I mean. One or two may escape. You think that you will be among the number, do you not?’

‘I mean to write a poem about the fight, sir.’

‘Happy confidence of youth!’ said the marquis. ‘I have no Song of Battle to write; I have the forty-second part of a bare chance of escape. To-morrow I may be here—or elsewhere; in case it is elsewhere, I wish to explain my conduct towards you. I should like to tell you also that your future, if you live, is assured; I have left you all that I possess.’

‘Why?’ said Lucien.

It was the only word that occurred to him in his bewilderment.

‘Firstly, I believe that you will, when you are a little older, write good poems. I am doing the best I can for my country if I endow you. Dark enough life has been, bright here and there with poetry; but I should not have made you my heir if you had not proved in the last eighteen months that you are capable of earning your own livelihood. I see now that if I help France to another poet, I shall not deprive her of a man.’

‘I cannot accept,’ said Lucien. ‘I can only write sometimes, not always. I found that out when Blum tried to make me work for the papers. If I took the money, and did nothing, I should be dishonoured; I had rather starve.’

‘You are right; it would be better for you,’ said the

marquis. 'But hear my second reason. You have not lived to your present age without any conjecture as to the circumstances of your birth?'

'I do not allow myself to think,' said Lucien, after a moment's pause. 'I honour my mother's memory.'

'You are right there, too,' said the marquis.

He seemed to meditate.

'I am not going to tell you a long story,' he went on later; 'narrative is not my strong point. The heroine of "The Tempest"—a play I like much better than that "Macbeth" about which the Romantic School makes such a fuss—the heroine of "The Tempest," I say, fell asleep while her father was explaining to her how she came to be born, and I do not desire that you should play Miranda to my Prospero. Transcendentially, it does not matter in the least whether or no, for forty or fifty years, you call yourself by the name which I bear. I am not your father. Could I have killed the man who was, I would have done so.'

'Tell me, sir, I beseech you: is my mother living?'

The marquis shook his head.

'Except in you—no.'

'Then, I am like her?'

'So like her that in you I see no one else. Madame was the first to point out to me another resemblance; that may or may not be deceptive. It was the last hope that I had of stopping her in this mad enterprise, and I did not scruple to use it. I do not ask your forgiveness.'

'Then, my father——'

'I do not know who he was. Your mother's brother was a hard man; he compelled her to go with him—in disguise, I think—to some remote country place,

where he told me that she herself, in a fit of madness, destroyed her child. This I never believed. She sent for me in secret before she died; she could hardly speak then. She gave me the snuff-box which I forwarded to the duchess by you, and a locked casket with a label, on which she had traced the words: "Promise me that you will never open this till you have found the key."

'Here is the key!' said Lucien.

He unfastened the silken chain that he wore round his neck, and handed it to the marquis, who looked at it curiously.

'What would I not have given once for the possession of that?' he said. 'Well, all things pass!'

When he resumed, it was in his usual tone.

'Keep it! You have more right to it than I. If you survive me, you will find the casket inside the deal box on the chest in my room. I have no idea of its contents. Was this your sole inheritance?'

'Except a few words, yes.'

As he had told it to Madame, Lucien told the tale of the stormy night—of the two strangers—of their conversation—in the same words that his foster-mother used when she told it to him. He felt quite unmoved. It was like fitting together the bits of a puzzle—his life was not concerned.

The marquis looked thoughtful.

'The two strangers were your uncle and your mother,' he said at last. 'Clearly they desired to leave upon the mind of their host the impression that they had killed something. It was New Year's Eve, you say. Your mother died in the month of March in the year 1812. Your uncle was killed by a fall from his horse in the February of the following year.'

‘Three months—and thirteen months.’

‘Yes; it seems to tally, but there is no link. They could not have known that they would die beforehand. The casket may contain the missing clue. The allusion to another woman puzzles me. I thought that no one but myself had any knowledge of the story. Stay! Your uncle, having no direct heirs, left all that he possessed to madame de Feuchères, who was a mere girl at the time. Your mother made a pet of her, and she was often at the house; but it occasioned some talk. They used to call her “the countess” in jest. You must find madame de Feuchères.’

‘Who is madame de Feuchères? Where can I find her?’

‘Who is she? That is what many men would like to know. You will find her in Paris. Ask anyone there and he will tell you who she is; only, no two people will agree. For myself I do not choose to speak of her. But she can do you no harm. She is rather old now. And she may tell you something that it is right you should hear.’

Again the shadowy past eluded Lucien just as he thought he was about to grasp it. Madame had seemed to hold it—the marquis had seemed to hold it—now this unknown madame de Feuchères held it. After all, it was but as a tale that is told. Before him lay the bright future, alive and glorious.

‘You see,’ said the marquis, ‘I have the right to provide for you. Your mother gave me nothing else, but she gave me that.’

Lucien remembered the bare, austere walls of the cell-like room at Morfontaine.

‘You will sell Morfontaine, or live there, as you please,’ continued the marquis.

Blank terror of desolation overcame the younger man at the words.

‘I cannot——’ he said, and stopped.

‘I have no son of my own,’ said the marquis. ‘There are certain provisions in my will—with regard to the cook, for example—I rely on you to carry them out, Lucien. The cook has done her duty by me.

‘Sir,’ said Lucien, ‘I will try to do mine.’

He had smiled at the recommendation of his protector; but, with quick reversion, ‘I cannot!’ he cried, putting his hand before his eyes. ‘I never can.’

‘Hush!’ said the marquis, ‘do not exaggerate. Remember—if you are wounded or killed to-morrow, you owe it to me. I sent you to Madame. I knew that what has happened would be likely to happen. I knew it was improbable that she would listen. There was but a slender chance; she outwitted me and her own conscience. Yet I thought—and I still think—it was right to risk your life to save that of others. War between men who speak the same speech is a terrible thing. Do you agree?’

‘When you sent me to Madame, sir, you made a mere existence life. Can you ask me if you were right?’

‘Ah!’ said the marquis, ‘then that was not life in Lyons? I thought as much. Your friend—what was his name?—failed to satisfy you in the end?’

‘He was and is my friend,’ said Lucien. ‘After yourself, sir, I love and respect him. But I could not live as he does. He does not know—the duchess.’

‘She is a remarkable woman, no doubt,’ said the marquis after a pause. ‘Religion—loyalty—are not mere words to her. She refused the duke of Condé’s

offer to endow her son with his vast property, for instance, because she would have nothing to do with madame de Feuchères. But I appealed to her in vain to stop this bloodshed. If I live, I shall appeal to her once more after to-morrow. Why did not de la Roberie join her at the Mill, by the way?'

'Her Royal Highness forgot to warn him.'

'Ah, she forgot!' said the marquis. 'Women are women, not angels. Remember that!'

Lucien reserved his opinion.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE FIRST FIGHT AND THE LAST

THE night passed quietly enough—the morning rose gloomy and dark.

The three trumpeters, who had gone out to reconnoitre, came home about ten o'clock, and gave it as their opinion that it would be safe to venture on Cugan.

The marquis shrugged his shoulders, but made no further comment.

They were tearing down the old trophies which adorned the hall, busily arming themselves with any weapon they could find, when a loud shout made everyone start, and a tremendous cry rang out, '*To arms!*'

'The sound comes from the direction of Clisson,' said the marquis; 'the Reds must be near enough. We cannot get out—that is certain—but they shall find that it is not so easy for them to get in. Up to the landing on the first story, boys! Quick! Monsieur le Romain will command there.'

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book.

'There are eight windows. The four brothers de Girardin—the elder and the younger Fourré—René le Romain—one of you to each, and take what supports you need. I will see to the seven windows on the ground-floor. Go with Le Romain, Sylvestre. Anyone who has pistols, here! You twelve men to

the Chapel! Trumpeters on the first-floor! Carbines and bayonets, there! Look to your swords! The rest, load and pass up!’

The clamorous voices hushed. Each man got silently to his place. Lucien held the window in the centre, next to Le Romain’s. When he looked up, the marquis was standing by him. Under the gray sky the hostile regiments pressed on.

‘There are thousands of them!’ cried Le Romain. ‘Will they never stop? May we fire, sir?’

‘Not yet. Wait till they reach the Chapel. We have not much ammunition. Remember not to waste it. Steady!’

He laid his hand on the shoulder of an eager marksman whose fingers were trembling.

Stillness had fallen on the defenders. Every man was at his post. Everyone had his lips tight—his eyes keenly set. Nearer and nearer came the cries.

‘Surrender!’

‘Yield!’

‘Surrender!’

‘May we shout, sir?’

‘No, wait.’

‘Surrender, brigands that you are!’

‘When?’ said Le Romain, between his teeth.

‘Not yet, not before they touch the angle of the Chapel wall.’

‘How slow they are!’

Even as he spoke Lucien saw that the soldiers were coming on at a run.

‘Sound trumpets!’ cried the marquis. ‘Long live Henri Cinq.’

The clangour of brass mingled with the wild shout

that echoed him. Fifteen men fell from the front rank. Every shot from every window had gone home. The soldiers halted.

Lucien shut his eyes for a second.

'Is this murder that I have done?'

'Again!' said the marquis.

'*In the image of God*——'

The words flashed before one of the defenders bright as the flash of the muskets.

'Long live the Regent!' cried Le Romain.

The loaded weapons were given back—the second volley whistled through the air.

Again fifteen men fell; but their places were filled up rapidly from behind, and this time the men came on—only a few steps, however. The blood rushed back to Lucien's heart, the faint horror left him as a ball flew past his head and lodged in the wainscot.

'They are aiming wildly,' said the marquis. 'A few more rounds like that, and they will retire. Gentlemen against the world, always!'

He was right. Encouraged by their officers, the Reds made a few more half-hearted attempts, and fell back.

Lucien and his fellows took breath.

In the momentary lull the marquis was here, there, everywhere. He had no need to complain of the spirit of his little garrison.

Peals of laughter greeted him.

Everyone worked with a will.

'Let not a man cross the yard!' he cried. 'If they fire the house, we are lost. Pull down the ceiling, you lazy loons here! Get out the beams! We must have loopholes up above. Consolidate the barricades!'

'Glorious!' shouted Le Romain.

'Glorious!' cried Lucien, seizing the musket as it was passed up to him and firing again. All the time he thought that glory was very much like murder.

'Glorious!' repeated Le Romain. 'If Victor Hugo were here, he——'

The rest of the sentence was lost in the clatter of falling beams, as a gigantic man with an axe let the light in behind.

'They are within twenty steps of us. Fire!'

A hail of bullets descended. The besiegers shook, wavered, fled. Shrieks of derisive triumph went up from the besieged.

'See, they are coming on again!'

Again they rushed across the yard. Again they came within twenty paces, only to be repulsed with heavier loss. In the pause that followed, Lucien heard a little clock on the mantelshelf strike five, and wondered if he had gone mad. Had they been fighting there seven hours?

'Volunteers for a forlorn hope!' cried the marquis.

'They are trying to get into the barn. If they set it on fire, the wind is towards us—we are lost. There is no loophole in that gable—the farm wall gives them cover. Volunteers to defend the barn!'

'Here am I!'

Lucien heard his own voice alone.

'It is desperate, sir,' said Le Romain, 'no one can possibly escape.'

'One will do,' said the marquis. 'Down the corridor, Lucien—the first door on the right. There are planks across. Hold the window of the barn while we pull the roof down. If they get that ladder planted, retire.'

Out of the storm of heat and noise into the momentary silence, the cool, narrow darkness of the arched passage! As he ran Lucien touched the thick stone wall with his hand to feel the fresh cold of it.

A moment after, besiegers and besieged saw his form clear against the sky on the plank bridge leading from the house to the barn, and heard a strong young voice sing:

‘ Death is gone a-riding
Where many riders be.
Not a man is hiding,
Never a man would flee.’

There was a breathless pause on either side. The last two lines were lost as he clambered in.

‘ Fire!’ cried the leader of the Reds.

Lucien had reached the window of the barn and flung it open. When the smoke cleared away, there he still stood, laughing and singing.

A ringing cheer went up from his own—broke, as if by compulsion, from the ranks of the enemy. He levelled his musket, and the private advancing with the ladder fell.

A second took it, a third, a fourth, only to meet the same fate.

The young fellow singing at the window bore a charmed life. Within the *château* itself man after man fell, badly wounded. Nothing could touch him. The roof was coming down bit by bit, but slowly, because few could be spared from the windows. The party in the Chapel had been compelled to retire; they reinforced the workers. While the ladder was not set up there was hope, for the Reds could not fire the barn.

Suddenly a harsh yell of delight rent the air. Sixteen men out of fifty had run the gauntlet along the wall; the ladder was planted. One tall stout man had his foot on the second rung. Lucien's last round was fired. A shot, whizzing by, grazed his cheek.

'Retire! retire!' shouted the defenders.

— Leaning far out from the window, putting forth all his strength in one great effort, Lucien hurled his assailant down the ladder. The air rang round him with cries of mingled wrath and admiration. The ladder was planted again—this time securely.

Again a crowd of men advanced to the assault.

'Retire!'

The voice of the marquis came, clear and stern, across the yard.

Lucien stood for an instant, holding his useless musket, raised his eyebrows as the balls whistled harmlessly round him, waved his hand to the colonel of the regiment, fled back over the wooden bridge. His comrades cheered him lustily as he walked in amongst them. Above the cheers, and with some different sense, he heard the quiet 'Well done!' of his leader.

'What a queer Song that was, too!' said the marquis.

'A young lady sang it, sir, at la Mouchetière,' said Lucien.

Meantime the Reds—though several of their number were fallen on the ground wounded—had climbed the ladder—were throwing bundles of lighted hay, packets of gunpowder, in at the window of the barn. They had scarcely time to withdraw before it burst into flame. A column of smoke rose up, blackening

the sky. Gallantly the trumpets still blared forth defiance; but René turned pale.

‘We shall catch fire,’ said the marquis.

‘Oh for the rain!’

But the rain, that had fallen in torrents the day before, held off. The wind blew the flame steadily against the doomed house.

‘What is that muffled sound?’

‘Rolling nearer and nearer. Like thunder. What can it be?’

‘Drums, gentlemen,’ said the marquis. ‘They have paid us the compliment of sending for reinforcements.’

‘Bravo, 29th of the Line!’ screamed René, clapping his hands.

The fusillade quickened. The woodwork of the windows flew under the bullets.

‘Cut the bridge!’ cried the marquis. ‘It will give us five minutes more.’

But even as he was speaking the stifling smoke rushed through the doorway. The beams shuddered and groaned.

‘The rain has begun—look!’ said René, pointing to a few great drops on the window-sill.

‘Too late!’

The trumpets sounded fiercely as ever.

‘Quick—quick there with the muskets!’ cried Lucien. ‘They are crossing the yard. They have lighted fagots—bundles of straw—on the end of their bayonets. Quick!’

‘We have fired our last shot,’ said the marquis.

Lucien looked round from the window, and saw that he was the only man still at his post. The room was full of white, resolute faces. Those below had

rushed up when their ammunition failed; the cracking and creaking of the roof had forced others to descend. In the centre stood the marquis.

‘Friends,’ he said, ‘we have made a brave fight, but we cannot stay here. Let us die as the men of la Vendée should. Let us say our prayers first.’

He fell upon his knees. With one accord they followed his example. Twenty-two were wounded mortally, or dead. The deep voices of the rest sounded as one.

‘Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.’

The air was thick with bullets. The crackling flames increased. Lurid tongues of flame shot through the smoke.

‘Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam.’

The beams cracked as if they were strained to bursting. Lucien could no longer see the face of the man next him for the smoke. He had a wild impulse to fight it back with his hands, but he kept them clasped.

‘Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me.’

The beams above were giving.

At the last verse they rose. Lucien felt the floor shake under him. Every man grasped the hand of his fellow.

‘Farewell!’

The little word was louder than the roar of the flames. But when he came to Lucien, the marquis stooped, kissed his forehead silently.

‘Forward, trumpets! After me! Lead the way!’ he cried, and made for the staircase.

His figure was lost instantly in the rolling clouds;

but the steady note of the trumpets led, though they themselves had become invisible, and the rest formed up, passed in good order through the flaming room, down the falling steps, out by the door into the garden. It was stiff on its rusty hinges, but one strong thrust burst it open, and they came forth, advancing at a run. A mighty crash behind told that the roof had fallen in.

‘On!’ cried the marquis, for one or two stopped, stupefied.

There fell Emile de Girardin. There fell Mouy, Gazeau, Leclerc, Jary. There fell many a brave man.

There fell René le Romain. And when he saw this, Lucien stopped.

‘On!’ cried the marquis. ‘He is dead.’

Across the meadow they struggled on—they fell.

Lucien’s fleetness of foot saved his life. He reached the river and plunged in. Fevered as he was, the touch of the ice-cold water came to him like the deep refreshment of sleep. He reached the other side, and sank exhausted.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHO REMAINS ?

‘THEY have killed Céline.’

These were the first words that Lucien heard, knowing certainly that they were spoken by someone else, not in his own sick brain.

Who was that sobbing?

He lifted his eyelids with an effort—surely there were tons of lead upon them. He was on a couch in a low dark room. At the foot sat Madame, her head buried in her hands.

‘She never weeps.’

He remembered hearing someone say this long ago. A pang of jealousy shot through him because, in some subtle way, Céline—the girl Céline—had made her weep. He could not keep his eyes open. And when he looked again she was gone.

‘They have killed Céline.’

Where had he heard the voice before?

Céline dead.

René dead.

And the marquis?

‘Come away,’ said another voice gently.

He thought it was his old nurse, bidding him go out into the field and gather poppies.

‘The poppy—*papaver*—means forgetfulness,’ said Father Dominic of the Seminary.

But this time he knew that Father Dominic spoke only in his light head.

'Can you tell me how it was?' the old voice far away out there in the room went on.

'It happened on Tuesday, before noon,' said the voice that was like Father Dominic reciting something he had got by heart. 'We were all away. There was no one at home except the steward. He is eighty. He had not even a gun. The 17th of the Line came up. They killed him and his wife and son—the boy on the farm, too.

'When they burst in, Loulou was standing near the secret hole. They thought Madame was hidden there. One of the soldiers put his rifle to the child's breast.

'“Tell me where she is, or I will fire!”'

'He never stirred. He is a brave little fellow.'

'Go on!' said the old voice tenderly.

'Céline was just behind. She ran forward, screaming, trying to save him. The ball went through her heart.'

'More than one must have fired. The child put out a wad that was burning in her hair,' said a different voice.

'Who told you?'

'Monsieur de la Roberie himself. He was in our camp at la Belinière the night before last. They brought him word at dawn. I never saw de Charette so moved. The men were raging; they swore to avenge her; they wanted to rush Pont-James.'

'Why did they not?'

'Hush! It was near la Brosse. We dared not risk Madame. De Charette made for le Chêne. We had reached the bridge, when we saw the Reds dash for-

ward to meet us. It would have done your heart good, sir, to hear the shouts of the old campaigners, "Now we'll show you how we used to fight long ago!" Your father fought like a hero, Jacinth. Twice we drove the Reds back.'

The door opened softly. Lucien was still too weary to lift his eyes, but he knew Madame had returned.

The second speaker went on.

'Your son, Monsieur de Mesnard, did wonders; he had his horse shot under him.'

'Stop!' cried a wild voice that startled even Lucien. 'This is no time for talk. A detachment of the enemy is signalled. Down—down to the trenches.'

A tall, thin figure stood in the door, the cheeks gaunt and bright with fever, the eyes hollow. He laid a burning hand on Lucien's arm and forced him up.

'Who is it?' whispered Lucien to de Monti.

'Bruneau de la Souchais. He and four others' (Edouard did not say that he had been one) 'led the men across the bridge at le Chêne. He was wounded. Madame bound up the wound herself when he arrived. Look! there is de Charette—alone, too! Hush! not a word! Quick! The ditch at the bottom of the garden!'

Flying, silent figures closed round them in the rain—de Mesnard, young de la Roberie, Eulalie, two others—Lucien recognised them all now, but still as in a dream. The marquis never came. No one spoke of him.

There, for six hours, did they remain, half sunk in water, the tall grass growing round and over them, a high, quickset hedge on one side, a thicket of bushes on the other. And the rain never ceased. Madame

took off her shawl and wrapped it round de la Souchais, who was too weak to resist.

The Reds were searching the neighbourhood—searching the house. At last their loud voices were heard in the garden.

‘Trapped!’ Lucien thought, feeling neither surprise, relief, nor fear.

The branches trembled overhead, and he crouched lower still. The Reds passed on. At a sign from Madame he pushed aside the long, wet blades of grass, and peered through.

‘Only cows eating the hedge!’ muttered a rough voice; and he drew down again with quiet caution. No one looked out after that.

At length, to his unspeakable comfort, night fell. There was no question of returning to la Brosse, and they walked on. It was better than the ditch. All the while, Céline’s Song rang in his head.

‘But there were no horsemen—she was a child!’ he kept saying stupidly to himself. ‘And she had not got the words right.’

Madame had recovered.

‘Robert Bruce only mounted the throne of Scotland when he had been defeated seven times. I will be constant as he.’

So she spoke. Lucien heard her out of his deafness, though he heard nothing else before or after.

Céline dead. René dead. And de Civrac?

No one spoke of de Civrac.

He dared not ask.

CHAPTER XXVI

‘NOTRE-DAME DU BOUT DU PONT!’

‘THREE miles to Nantes! Monsieur de Kersabiec’s house is near the Collège de Monseigneur le Duc de Bordeaux. The name sounds well in my ears,’ said Madame, consulting a map. ‘That is the destination of Petit-Paul and Petit-Pierre. Do you feel as if you could walk home to-day, Eulalie?’

‘To *Nantes*, Madame? It is full of your enemies.’

‘That is why I mean to go. They will believe anything of me except that I can walk straight into the midst of them. Wherever they look for me, they will not look for me there. No, no; I shall be hidden in a cave in Brittany, or at the bottom of a chest of drawers in la Vendée. People are so romantic.’

‘The Romantic School may surely count among its members Your Royal Highness?’ Eulalie said, with a laugh.

‘Me?’ she rejoined seriously. ‘Never! I am classic to the backbone. At the present moment I am a market-woman; so are you, Eulalie. You, Lucien, are a farm-boy, with a basket of cauliflowers. Allow me to introduce Mesdames Mariette and Françoise; they are bringing our dresses. They are the true market-women, born and bred. Be it our endeavour to imitate them in all things! The red aprons are charming, and the white caps. Bah! those thick

woollen stockings; they will be abominably hot to-day. And the shoes will be worse than the stockings.’

Dawn was warming and yellowing into sunrise. They had not gone far when she sat down on the edge of a ditch, and divested herself of shoes and stockings both.

‘I cannot bear them,’ she said, as she thrust them into her pocket, and resolutely plunged her little white feet into the black mud below. ‘I *cannot* walk in them. Do not frown, Eulalie. I will put them on again whenever we come to the gates of a town.’

‘You will hurt your feet, Madame.’

‘Oh no! There is always grass along the side of the road. I will walk there.’

Lucien remembered Céline. He went still as if but half conscious, hearing her voice in his ears, and seeing the sudden peace upon the face of René, when the marquis cried, ‘He is dead.’ He was not sorry for them, but he was all day long accompanied by a dumb wonder where they were. He said their names over and over again, and the mere names killed everything except wonder.

Madame was the only being who had power to rouse him; he was wide awake to all that concerned her. Still, the one question that he asked ceaselessly of himself he never dared to ask anyone else. Had the marquis escaped?

Presently, as he trudged along behind the two true and the two false market-women, he heard Madame say:

‘Yes, dear Eulalie, I will come to you. It is wrong; I have endangered you too much already; but if the house should be suspected, two Legitimist ladies, rue

Haute-du-Château, No. 3, are willing to take me in. That is quite close to you, is it not?'

'Not five minutes' walk. Mesdemoiselles du Guiny live there. They are old friends of ours, and we are all very fond of them. Mademoiselle Pauline is my god-mother.'

Du Guiny—rue Haute-du-Château—Lucien surely knew those words. Yes, it was there that the sieur de Coquet was to be heard of. The sieur de Coquet was, he believed, the marquis. Hope flashed up in him, for reason has little to do with the comings and goings of hope. He could ask these ladies; the right to ask would give him the power. They would not know that he was anything to the marquis, or the marquis to him.

At this point in his reflections, the little group was challenged by a sentinel—a stupid, boozy fellow, who let them go fast enough.

They had no leisure for thought afterwards. The posts were doubled at every gate. Agents of the police were swarming everywhere. At the *bureau de douâne* on the bridge of Pirmil, which they had to cross in order to reach the town, sat an officer of the Customs writing busily at a table, and no one was allowed to pass without examination. They halted for an instant, Madame questioning Eulalie with a look.

'There is no other bridge,' said Eulalie.

Mariette went up first.

'Where do you come from?'

'From la Haute-Menantie.'

The official thrust his hands hither and thither in her basket, found nothing but eggs and cabbages, and let her pass.

‘Have you anything to declare?’ he asked of Madame, who came next.

‘*Nenni!*’ said the voice of the peasant-boy whom Lucien had met in the forest, and she boldly put forward her basket. Her sleeve ran up as she did so, and showed a white arm, very unlike the brown hand at the end of it. Eulalie shivered. Lucien counted the arches of the bridge, and found there were eleven. The officer of the Customs did not expect to see a white arm just then, however, and he did not see it.

They crossed several other bridges, Madame and her companions sometimes in front, sometimes behind. Mariette and Françoise took their leave, and went on to the market-place. The sun glared down out of a cloudless sky; even the river ran like molten steel. Weary of the heat and the dust, the two ladies sat down to rest on the parapet of a bridge dedicate to the Virgin.

A rough hand was laid on her shoulder, and Madame started. But it was only an ancient apple-woman who had put down her basket, and could not get it up on her head again.

‘Help me, children!’ said she, ‘and I will give you an apple apiece for your pains.’

Lucien dared not interfere. Madame took one handle, Eulalie the other; between them they hoisted the basket, full as it was and very heavy.

The old woman thanked them, and was turning away when Madame caught her arm.

‘And our two apples—have you forgotten those?’

‘There they are!’ said the old woman, smiling; and Madame tossed one to Eulalie, and sat down to munch the other herself.

‘Fair wages for fair work!’ said she. ‘When I came into Nantes four years ago, the market-girls had written up everywhere, “Our fruit, our flowers, our hearts are Madame’s.” Now they grudge me an apple! I thought I should have broken my arm. How like the old woman her apples are, by the way—wrinkled and rosy-cheeked! Shall we look like that forty or fifty years hence, Eulalie?’

Céline was safe, thought Lucien, with a thrill; she never could look old.

‘What are all those people crowding down to the other end of the bridge for?’ said Madame, rising. ‘I shall go and see.’

‘Oh no! Let us walk on,’ cried Eulalie. ‘There are so many soldiers about, and it is nearly eight o’clock.’

‘You are right, dear; but that bit of paper is interesting. I want to see what it says.’

Eulalie cast a glance of despair at Lucien; he shook his head. To thwart Madame was to increase her determination.

‘Stay here!’ he signed to Eulalie; he himself sauntered down to the other end in the train of her mistress.

A man in Government uniform was pasting up a royal Proclamation, in letters of huge type, on the door of the Customs office. Therein it was stated that the four Departments of Maine-et-Loire, Vendée, Deux-Sèvres, and Loire-Inférieur were in a state of siege—and that a large reward would be given to anyone who apprehended the person of Marie-Caroline, Duchess of Berry, height about five foot three, pale complexion, fair hair, blue eyes, hands small and white.

Madame glanced down at hers, and laughed.

‘Well done, Louis-Philippe!’ said she. ‘Here am I in front of my own portrait, and nobody knows it. You are right to be afraid of me still.’

She turned to go back, but the crowd was increasing every minute, and a detachment of infantry chancing to cross the bridge just then made it impossible for them to return.

‘I know the officer in command,’ cried Madame, seizing Lucien’s arm. ‘Let us go. He used to be on guard at the Tuileries.’

It was all very well for her to speak. They were surrounded on every side.

‘There is nothing for it but to wait now.’

The clock of the Bouffai struck. Lucien counted the strokes as he had counted the arches under the bridge of Pirmil. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight.

‘Notre-Dame du bout du pont,
Secourez-moi à l’heure qu’il est!’

murmured Madame.

It was the old Song that the women of Navarre sang before the birth of Henri Quatre—that she herself had sung when Henri Cinq was born.

The men were halted opposite the Proclamation. The officer was gazing fixedly in their direction. He half lifted his hand. Every instant Lucien thought to hear the word ‘Arrest!’ but the officer wheeled quickly round, and gave the order to proceed. Madame drew a long breath.

‘He stared hard,’ she whispered. ‘I think he knew me again. If he did—if the luck turns—he shall see

that Caroline of France remembers the debts of Caroline of Vendée.'

Her meeting with the officer formerly on guard at the Tuileries had sobered her. She marched forward, no longer assisting old apple-women nor lingering to read descriptions of her own face and figure.

She became practical, gave Lucien the address of the ladies du Guiny, and told him to go to them for advice as to his lodging.

At last Lucien saw her disappear, accompanied by Eulalie, behind a modest back-door in an alley. There was nothing now between him and the answer to that question about the marquis, drumming and beating in his brain; but he could not go on without food. He snatched a hasty meal at a *café* and set off at once for rue Haute-du-Château, No. 3.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE OLD HOUSE AT NANTES

It was a picturesque old house, one side looking to the river. A broad road, dusty white in the sun, swept past in front. On the other side lay the Castle moat—grim, gray walls rising above it in dreary grandeur. Up in the sky sailed a cloud like a tortoise with a little white head and a curly tail.

‘I shall never see another cloud like that,’ said Lucien, to justify his irresolution as he stood looking.

At length he forced himself to knock.

The voice and manner of the maid who let him in were quiet, almost cloistral. The cool, cave-like air of the stone corridor through which she ushered him, the soft reposeful silence, stilled and refreshed him. He crossed a little yard, followed his guide up a staircase with iron railings, and found himself in a long, low parlour, between dark wainscoted walls on which a stain of faded colour showed here a maiden against an urn, there a dovecot, and there, again, a ruined tower against a tranquil golden sky. In the shadowy window-seat, an open book on her knee, sat a tall, graceful lady in a white cap. Near the table stood another, filling a bowl with deep red roses. The beautiful hair drawn straight up from her forehead was white, and there were lines along the brow though she was not yet old; the hazel eyes were full of half-wistful regret—of the unspoken tenderness of one who does not readily

express herself in words. Under her strong, nervous hands the roses seemed to grow this way and that.

‘Monsieur Sylvestre, I believe?’ the elder lady said, coming forward with gentle eagerness.

Neither she nor her sister showed surprise, only pleasure; he knew at once that, by name, at least, he was no stranger to them.

‘We have a letter for you—from the *sieur de Coquet*,’ she continued, smiling as she placed it in his hands. ‘Pray be seated, sir. The heat has made you a little faint, has it not?’

Still Lucien could not speak. This question beat in him like a live thing, choking utterance.

‘Is the *marquis* well?’ he said at last.

‘Quite well,’ said *mademoiselle du Guiny*. ‘We do not call him “the *marquis*” at Nantes, you know. He is the *sieur de Coquet*. Be so good as to read your letter. There may be a message in it for me.’

Lucien opened it as she suggested; but his hand shook, and for a minute he could not see. It was a short note, merely informing him that *mesdemoiselles du Guiny* would see to his accommodation, and provide him with anything that he wanted.

‘Where is he—where is the *sieur de Coquet*?’

‘I do not know myself; he escaped from the fight at *la Pénissière*, but he has been in close hiding ever since. The *Orleanists* were furious; they lost heavily.

‘You are very anxious about him?’ asked *mademoiselle Pauline*.

‘I thought he was dead,’ said Lucien, turning away. They were all three silent.

‘Ah, well!’ said the elder lady, ‘I should never think the *sieur de Coquet* was dead, unless he told me so

himself. His guardian angel takes good care of him; he has escaped five or six times when any reasonable man would have been killed. It ought not to surprise you, sir, so much; if what I hear be true, it is not your fault that you left la Pénissière alive either. Now that we have told you all we can about the sieur de Coquet, have you any news to give us of Petit-Pierre?'

There was something in the manner of Mesdemoiselles du Guiny which encouraged autobiography in those who talked to them. They did not only listen; they followed Lucien along the dusty road, over the dangerous bridge. Never before had he felt conscious that he possessed remarkable power as a story-teller.

'Dear Eulalie!' murmured mademoiselle Pauline. 'Those moments on the bridge before you came back—what they must have been for her!'

'And to think it was all happening an hour or two ago, when we were down in the kitchen scolding Marie because the coffee was not hot enough!' said her sister. 'One can hardly bear it.'

Little by little, not questioning much, but by their craft of silent expectation, of looks, of sighs, of half-breathed cries of sympathy, they drew from him all that he knew of Madame—almost all that he knew of himself. Nor did the time, though the tale of a life was told in it, seem long to any of the three. Mademoiselle Pauline set the last rose in the bowl just as he finished.

'And now,' her sister murmured, with a glance at the failing light, 'we must not keep you. We are following our leader in Nantes; we mean to be bold. I have obtained permission for you to lodge in one of the deserted rooms of the Castle; they will not suspect a

Royalist of hiding there. An old servant of ours takes care of the State apartments; she will see to your comfort, and the oftener you favour us with your society, the better we shall be pleased. In a day or two—who knows?—Petit-Pierre may be under this roof. Our good friend, monsieur de Kersabiec, is in prison, and suspicion will, I fear, attach to his house. We have a famous hiding-place upstairs.'

'A famous hiding-place!'

Lucien recollected the hole at la Mouchetière—shuddered—thought what a fool he was to shudder.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DAYS FLY FAST

As he entered the large, bare room, bright with bouquets of la France, which Mademoiselle Pauline had prepared for him, Lucien little thought that this would be his home for five months yet to come.

Strong desire urged him to quit Nantes at once for Paris. The marquis was there; Hugo was there; madame de Feuchères—who might, perhaps, tell him his name—was there. Stronger desire held him fast to that room in the Castle. Madame had not gone. How could he go? how could he leave her? As for his name, what did that matter? He meant to make himself a name.

At the end of three days Madame came to the demoiselles du Guiny, bringing with her monsieur de Mesnard, and Stylite de Kersabiec instead of her sister Eulalie, who had broken down after the long strain. She still kept the same resolute silence about the marquis. Once or twice, when Lucien mentioned him, she affected not to hear; nor did she ever speak of the fight at la Pénissière.

Lucien appealed to the elder of the two hostesses, who looked distressed.

‘I fear there has been a misunderstanding,’ said she, ‘I do not know what it is. The sieur de Coquet has the most loyal heart in France.’

On June 20 Madame took a step which surprised them all.

She asked Lucien to help her draw up a circular addressed to the chiefs of la Vendée, wherein she counselled them to avoid fight except in self-defence. She did not like the task, she said; but she felt happier when it was done.

Six days later de Charette contrived to visit the house. He was urgent with her to fly while there was yet time.

‘I shall always have time to quit France,’ she said.

Her hopes were reviving.

Many of the Legitimists—even those recently in opposition—had come to think as she did during the interval. New proofs of the unstable character of Louis-Philippe’s Government, of the disaffected condition of the people, poured in thick and fast. European complications were imminent; war with Holland was expected. Her sister, the Queen of Spain, advised her to stay. All this she pressed upon de Charette.

‘Your Royal Highness will compromise your followers. If you are taken——’

‘Let me be taken, then!’ cried Madame. ‘It will be all the better. If they cut off the head, they will let the body alone.’

‘It is only a question of weeks,’ de Charette observed to Lucien afterwards. ‘She cannot stay. It is a pity that she has quarrelled with de Civrac.’

‘Quarrelled?’

‘Yes; he had an interview with her after la Pénis-sière. I believe that he entreated her to stop the war. If anyone had a right to speak, he had; for he had done her kingly service. But she was very angry.’

‘She has not seen——’ said Lucien, as there rose before him in terrific strength a host of recollections which he was fighting, night and day, to banish.

‘No. But I do not think that was all. She is curiously tolerant of difference of opinion—more tolerant than any woman I know. He must have asked her some question—criticised her conduct in some way. Their meeting ended in a storm of passion; she declared that she would never see him again. Those who were in the house at the time say that they never saw her so indignant. It was the day she wept for mademoiselle de la Roberie.’

‘Ah!’

‘Vexatious for the moment, because it loses us de Civrac’s head, which is as good as de Civrac’s arm, and better! He is hiding in Paris. No great danger, I think. He knows very well how to hide. He can take care of himself. I have my work cut out for me, for I shall have to try and get Achille Guibourg out of the Prison Neuve. He is in some peril. You must do what you can to persuade Madame to beat a retreat.’

‘I will try,’ said Lucien, a dagger going straight through his heart.

It is no easy matter to give advice to a lady when she is not in the humour to be advised. He succeeded so well that Madame forbade him to mention the subject again; whereat his spirits rose marvellously and he returned with zeal to the study of the twenty-four different kinds of cipher that she used for her correspondence. He was able to help her often, for the white ink which it was needful to employ fatigued her eyes.

When she could no longer write, she would draw and paint the roses under mademoiselle Pauline’s guidance.

'Lilies for our Bourbons! Laurels for Henri! Roses for Louise!' she would say, recalling the inscription on the triumphal arch under which she had passed on her way through Nantes four years before. 'I have done nothing for my Louise!'

She would paint the roses until she tired of them, and then take up her work, copying in delicate embroidery the poppies that Lucien brought her after long walks into the country, for she was clever with her needle as with her pen and her brush. Any instrument on which the little white hand closed seemed to acquire something of its grace, of its light firmness.

One day she made up her mind to paper the dingy walls of the garret she shared with Stylite, in softest gray. No craftsman could have done the business half so well, mesdemoiselles du Guiny declared; they would keep the garret always like this in memory of their sweet guest.

Up to the garret she would fly, whenever the sound of a bell was heard on the ground-floor. After her quiet dinner with the three ladies and de Mesnard would be interrupted in this way, but as yet there was no cause for serious alarm. Lucien came and went at dusk or in the early morning, and his frequent visits passed unobserved. Stylite and de Mesnard left the house rarely—she herself, never, in spite of the heat within doors, which wearied her and made her pale and thin, though not a whit less gay.

She showed Lucien the secret place behind the panelled fireplace of her room.

'I hope it will not come to that,' she said with an odd look at him.

'I hope not.'

'But if I have to go, will you come too?'

'Yes.'

She saw his gravity, and laughed.

Once, however, Lucien found her much disturbed. This was after a conversation with Stylite's eldest sister, Céleste, who had implored her to write to her aunt, Marie-Amélie, wife of Louis-Philippe, on behalf of monsieur de Kersabiec, now awaiting his trial.

Céleste wept and entreated. Stylite remained stoically silent, refusing to say a word in support of her sister. De Mesnard uttered a grave remonstrance.

'My son is in prison at Niort,' said he. 'I do not know how far he is compromised. I have almost as much to fear for him, ladies, as you have for your father. Nevertheless, I should think myself guilty indeed if I prevailed upon Madame to take a step which might compromise her.'

Céleste would not or could not hear reason. There would be no risk to Madame. A friend had told her of a faithful emissary whose name she could only disclose to Madame in private. Madame had known and trusted him before. Marie-Amélie would have no conception from what quarter of the globe the letter came; but she had always loved her niece—she would move the King to be merciful. Monsieur de Kersabiec had powerful enemies. It was a matter of life and death.

'It is a matter of life and death—for more than one,' cried de Mesnard, forgetting his usual courtesy.

'Come with me, Céleste!' said Madame. 'I want to hear the name of the envoy.'

Stylite rose, and they left the room abruptly.

'If Madame yields, we are all dead men,' said de Mesnard.

Lucien stood looking down into the courtyard.

He had been a dead man so often in the estimation of monsieur de Mesnard that the words had little significance.

‘There goes mademoiselle Céleste, as if the police were on her track!’ he remarked presently.

‘She deserves that they should be. I hope Her Royal Highness gave her a good lecture before she sent her flying. Well, there is an end of that business, Heaven be thanked!’

Lucien made no response.

Stylite rejoined them soon afterwards, but he read nothing in her set face as she bent over the table, busying herself with some accounts. De Mesnard took up a book. The air of the room grew close, grew stifling all at once.

There was an instant sense of relief when Madame glided in, threw herself on her knees beside Stylite, put her arms round her, and whispered:

‘Forgive me, dear! I could not help it! I gave her the letter.’

Stylite’s slow tears began to fall one by one.

‘It is not right—it is not right. He would rather have died.’

De Mesnard’s face changed.

‘Hush!’ he said. ‘Her Royal Highness is an example to us all. She has faith in Heaven. Let us have faith too!’

Lucien had faith—more than faith. Against his sober judgment he was filled with joy. It was to him inconceivable that this lady of all ladies should ever take the lower—the less heroic part.

‘The secret agent is a man in whom I have every

confidence,' she told him later on. 'I know the fellow well. He used to carry despatches to my sister of Spain, and to Portugal, when I was at Massa.'

That evening Lucien received a note from the marquis.

'Come to Paris as soon as she has left,' thus it ran. 'Ask for me in Montmartre at the Hotel of the Three Elephants. Do not answer this.'

'As soon as she has left—ah!'

Because of Madame, Lucien was growing fonder and fonder of his bare room high up among the deserted attics of the Castle. Because of Madame, he laboured to forget—he almost did forget—the deep eyes of Céline, and René dead in the flower of youth. The love of Blum was gone from him as though it had not been, and Jeanne passed like a shadow from his remembrance. Only now and again the dead, by that strange power they have, compelled him to remember. At such moments he wondered if Madame forgot. Because of her, the hope of fame burnt red as never in life before.

Hugo was the only man of whom he felt much afraid—Hugo the Victor, Hugo the ineffable poet, who had weak eyes and lived in Paris.

Béranger was old; Alexandre Dumas as yet a mere name to him. Hugo, however—not to speak of 'Marion'—had written 'Les Orientales' and 'Hernani,' and he was understood to be at work upon another play, 'Le Roi s'Amuse,' finer than any of these, to be acted at the Théâtre Français some time in November.

'Go to him the night his new play comes out, when all the flatterers have done, and say——'

Lucien had not forgotten his promise to René.

Before the final moment came, he must write something that would live. He dared not see the greater poet till this was done. He must write something not unworthy of Madame. He wrote and wrote until the pen dropped from stiff fingers; but what he wrote—whether it was good, bad, or indifferent—will never be known, for seven days after it was written he always put it into the fire. His Songs came to him of themselves; he had to go far afield for his Plays, and when he had found them, they were not his, but Victor Hugo's.

Nothing daunted, he began again upon a great success as soon as he had destroyed the last failure.

Now he was carried away with delight, now overwhelmed by dejection. He shrank with sensitive terror from the thought that Madame should even suspect his labours. When the hour struck, he would lay his triumph at her feet. In common with the rest of the Romantic School, he was studying the reign of Elizabeth. He saw himself a new Spenser, if not yet quite a Shakespeare, at the Court of the Faery Queen.

No sovereign ever ruled a more bewildered kingdom than was hers now, a kingdom of night, of shadows, that existed only in the sun's absence.

Lucien, as was his custom, had caught a fancy from some true aspect; his heroine was the Lady of a land that vanished every morning at sunrise, to reappear with the rising moon.

'A Prince among the Shades while he was still alive on earth!' said the duchess one day, when she read in the paper the death of Napoleon's only son, the duc de Reichstadt. 'Oh, Lucien, will my son's fate be his?'

‘No, Madame!’ said Lucien firmly; for he felt sure that miracles were among the most common events in the world.

In the rare moments that she had to spare, when she was neither painting, papering, nor corresponding, the duchess would make him read aloud her favourite Waverley Novels. Together they mourned the death of Scott that year. Together their cheeks flushed, their eyes glowed, over the adventures of Morton, of Frank Osbaldistone, of Darsie, and Alan Fairford. The lyrics of ‘Waverley’ and of ‘The Heart of Midlothian’ drove all the heroes and heroines out of Lucien’s head. And then Madame, deciding that he had not attended to the plot, would say severely:

‘I prefer deeds to words.’

Mesdemoiselles du Guiny would bend low over the wreaths on their embroidery-frames to hide a smile.

Deferring to their guest in all serious affairs, they treated her in lesser matters as a beloved child; and she repaid them with the gentle playfulness that made life under the same roof with her a merry business. Their little interests became hers, as her great interests were theirs. Lucien moved in a charmed circle of sweetness.

And so the roses waned, the spotted lilies carrying the seven spears that were, Madame said reverently, ‘the Seven Sorrows of Mary’ followed; and in the gardens of Nantes thistles pushed up their balls of spiky blue, and travellers’ joy starred the cracked walls with purple.

Lucien knew little of the outward changes of Nature, though he went late to bed and rose early. He was compassed round with forms of fire at night and

the fiery rising of the sun drew him day by day to his window; but for the most part he was fast asleep with his eyes open, and saw nothing but a world of dreams and one face.

Early in August Achille Guibourg had escaped from the Prison Neuve, walking out in the face of a dozen soldiers ready to fire on any prisoner who attempted to make his exit. He remained hidden with de Charette, who had assisted him, first in one house, then in another; and they both came, now and again, under cover of night, to the parlour at No. 3, rue Haute-du-Château. Finally Achille Guibourg took up his abode there.

‘It is always on the rainy nights that they come, never when it is fine,’ said the only person who watched outside the house. ‘But *he* goes always, whether it is wet or fine, only he waits until it is dark, and every night he comes away by a different street. Where does he live, I wonder?’

There was but one being called *he* in Mademoiselle Jeanne’s vocabulary, and that was Lucien. She believed that the marquis was hidden in the old house.

She had heard from others of his conduct in the fight at la Pénissière, and she remembered enough to feel something stronger than a suspicion that he had friends at Nantes.

So, while the clematis was still in flower, Michaelmas daisies began, and the chrysanthemums thrust forth their red and gold.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE OTHER POSTMAN

‘THE letter is not signed,’ said the Minister of the Interior; ‘but, then, they never are! *Important State secrets*—it sounds well, it sounds well, Charles Blum. There is one that I would give a thousand pounds to know just now, and that is, where the duchess of Berry sleeps to-night. Louis-Philippe’s house is not safe. Constitutional monarchy will never rest on a solid foundation so long as that Will-o’-the-wisp is free to wander. Well, she has not left France! The note you posted to your friend over the wall stopped that. She has had no opportunity since. Every port is watched. Have you any idea what became of your friend after the fight at la Pénissière? His name was not among the killed.’

‘I believe him to be hiding in la Vendée.’

‘Have you any reasons?’

Now, Blum could not endure bewilderment. If reasons were not forthcoming, he made them.

‘Wherever the duchess may be, he is not far off. The safest course for her would be la Vendée.’

‘She is a woman,’ said Thiers, his Southern accent sounding more strongly than usual, as it did when he became animated. ‘A woman does not take the safest course. I have no great opinion of female genius. What do you yourself think of the duchess? Has she genius?’

‘She is clever.’

‘Undoubtedly; but, like many another clever woman, she makes attempts that are mistaken for results. She has missed the natural grace of the being that keeps its place. She is punished for not having kept it by want of charm, by disorder of mind, by a celebrity the burden of which the strongest man could scarcely bear. We shall have no peace, however, till she is caught. Let me see!’ He pondered over the mis-sive. ‘This anonymous person requests me to go alone to-night to meet her—of course it is a woman—near the *rond-point* of the Champs Elysées, in the shrubbery bordering on the Allée des Veuves. “Widows’ Alley”—that sounds appropriate.’

‘Do not go alone, sir,’ said Blum; ‘the place has an ill name. You cannot tell that it is a woman. There may be some plot.’

The Minister of the Interior did not seem to hear him.

‘I shall start immediately. Write to your Lyons editor and tell him to divert public attention from the duchess, and not to call her “Caroline.” It is bad taste. I shall find you here on my return?’

‘Let me come with you, sir.’

Thiers shook his head.

‘Warn the police. Have someone within call,’ urged Blum.

Again his entreaty fell on deaf ears. A few minutes later he heard the hall door close. For an instant he hesitated; then he rang the bell.

‘Send Monsieur Joly to me. I have a message for him from the Minister.’

Joly was the Commissioner of Police in attendance

on Thiers, and in spite of his real anxiety Blum enjoyed giving this order in the brief style of the potentate, the rising man, the last favourite.

He had written half his letter to Lyons before the servant came back.

‘Monsieur Joly is out, sir.’

‘Send for one of his men.’

The letter was finished. The servant reappeared.

‘All Monsieur Joly’s men are out, sir.’

‘No matter. I am going to the post. I shall be back directly.’

He set forth at once for the Champs Elysées, but he had not gone far when he recognised first one of Joly’s men, then another, lastly Joly himself, all going the same way. He shrugged his shoulders and returned. It was like Thiers: often he would appear to disregard advice which he followed afterwards.

Blum felt some elation as he possessed himself of the Minister’s chair under the shaded lamp, in the beautiful study rich with trophies of the art of the Renaissance.

Not that these affected him in the least. He was not sensitive to refinements of comfort or of beauty. He never wasted a glance on the fine casts of the Farnese Hercules, of Mercury, of Cellini’s Perseus, of Michael Angelo’s Day, Night, Evening, and Morning. If he looked at Colleone’s statue, it was only to remark that the action was unusual in a horse, and to wonder why the Minister of the Interior liked it.

No; he saw before him vast opportunities for the only art he cared about—the art of moulding the lives of others. The cry of his brethren toiling, dying, in the Silken City, rang in his ears. When once he had

risen to power, he would not rest till he had helped them—when once he had gained Lucien to their cause—had rescued him, the one man whom he loved, from the snares of the wicked duchess. Blum no longer thought her absurd.

He was filled with bitter wrath against her. The trick she played on him when she sent him with madame de Nacquart to Bressuire had convinced him, once for all, that she was not an antagonist whom he could afford to despise, this woman who had stained France with blood. She was laying heavy burdens on those who, but for her, would have stood forth the champions of the poor and the afflicted. She had brought politics to a dead-lock. She had wrought confusion among the wisest. She was Evil personified. That it should be personified in a woman was no matter to Blum, who took little account of the laws of chivalry.

When he thought of a woman with any gentleness, he thought of Jeanne—of her alone.

For the sake of France, for the sake of his friend Lucien, and, in some undefined way, for the sake of Jeanne, the duchess must be found.

‘There was nobody,’ said Thiers, interrupting his meditations—‘not a trace of anyone. The whole affair is a hoax. There was no one at all. I never thought there would be.’

Blum suppressed an inclination to ask why, in that case, the Minister of the Interior had gone.

‘The note stipulated that I should come alone,’ he continued, as if to himself. ‘It is unlikely that the police agents were seen; they took care to hide. Still, traitors have sharp eyes. There is a story that the

duc de Berry might have been saved if Charles X. had not neglected a similar warning. I wish I could forget. It makes a fool of me. I am sorry I went. Good-night, my dear Blum. *A demain!*'

Blum reflected on the character of his chief. He admired success, and Thiers was a highly successful man.

Next day he seized a moment, when they were alone, to put a dirty envelope into Blum's hand. Inside was written:

'You were accompanied. Come alone to-night. You will be rewarded.'

'It is just,' he said. 'I begin to think it must be a man—so cautious! After all, he risks more than I do. Wait for me in the study again this evening.'

Again Blum waited.

When the Minister came in, later than on the preceding night, his eyes, half hidden under their bushy eyebrows, were sparkling.

'Well,' said he, 'she is at Nantes.'

'Impossible!' said Blum. 'She would never dare!'

'What did I tell you? Caution was left out in the superior sex.'

'Then you have perfect confidence in the betrayer?'

'He is an abject creature. I do not think he could invent even a lie. I never saw such a mean thing.'

'You found him in the shrubbery?'

'Yes; there was no one else. *Traitor* was written all over him. I knew I could not be mistaken.'

'“You summoned me. Here I am. What do you want with me?” I said.

“Five thousand francs.”’

‘Five thousand francs!’ cried Blum.

‘I took it more philosophically than you, my friend.’

“‘Done,” said I, “if you give me the information I want. Whom does this precious secret concern?”

‘Even then he hesitated, looked round as if he thought the sycamores were spies, stammered at last:

“‘Madame.”

‘It seems he is, or was, one of her letter-carriers. I cannot congratulate her on the choice of her postman. She sent a letter to the Queen by him. He vows she is at Nantes, but he does not know in which quarter of the town. I tried in vain to make him disclose the source of his information, but he will come to the Ministry of the Interior by the secret door to-morrow night. If I am satisfied—and I think I shall be; I think he is sincere—I shall warn the préfet of Nantes, Maurice Duval, and Joly. Joly arrested Louvel, the murderer of the duke. He is accustomed to look after the affairs of the de Berry family. I should wish you to go to Nantes with him. You know the duchess well by sight?’

‘Perfectly,’ said Blum, who thought she was the lady that dropped his pencil-case—madame de Nacquart.

‘If your friend is with her, as you think, you may find him about the town. He might help you to trace her. Joly is not acquainted with him.’

‘I suppose the former stipulation holds good, sir? If I help in the arrest of the duchess, I am to be allowed to contrive my friend’s escape? I am heartily on your side, as you know; but I will not undertake the business except with this proviso.’

‘A bargain, as usual,’ said the Minister of the Interior. ‘Well, I am in the humour for granting bargains. Be it so! By the way, what is your friend?’

‘A poet, sir.’

‘Oh, a poet! Let him go, then. He will do no harm. I have always cherished a weakness for literature.’

CHAPTER XXX

NIGHT

COMING events do not always cast their shadows before them. The sun rises and sets as usual on the day that changes life; but the actions that loom so large in the brief career of man are not caught between light and the earth.

There fell a day in September when, correspondence being unusually slack at No. 3, rue Haute-du-Château, Lucien had seized the chance of working hard at his last Play. He had been bending over the table for three or four hours at a stretch, when suddenly, in an instant, all his ideas failed him, and not a single word would answer to the mental image. When this happened it was vain, as he knew from experience, to make any further effort; he was in a state of weary irritation that nothing but the open air could soothe.

Blessing Heaven for twilight, he sallied forth and found himself, after a few minutes' walk, on the banks of the river. He did not go there as a rule, preferring the open country beyond; but that day he had a strong wish to see water flow. Certain motions of water—cloud—fire—or wind—attracted him when his own vital forces ran low.

Cloudy skies wove a gray, ungenial atmosphere, and he was stamping up and down as hard as he could to keep himself warm, when he was struck by the melancholy grace of a gentleman leaning against a tree by

the waterside. There is about some people a distinction which makes the commonest action not altogether common. The gentleman—an Italian by his dark hair and colour—was trying to hit a stake in the water with a stone. He never succeeded, though the stake stood close enough to the shore.

Lucien smiled to himself.

‘I could imagine that man would fling away wealth, talents, life itself with the same carelessness.’

Every time he roused himself to make the effort the stone splashed into the water, now short of the stake, now beyond. He did not exert any great strength, nor did he grow impatient. After an interval of a few minutes he always began again.

‘Will he ever hit the stake before dark?’ thought Lucien; and, idly fascinated by the game, he passed and passed again. The face of the man was very handsome; there was just light enough left to see the sensitive nostrils, the tremulous, delicate lines of forehead and mouth.

‘He looks as if he might be Tasso or Ariosto, and there he is, and he cannot hit a stick with a stone!’

The light had faded altogether. Only a lamp here and there, or a lantern slung from the boats or flitting and gliding about them, flashed spots of red and yellow on the darkness. The Italian still continued to amuse himself by paving the river-bed.

‘He is just such a fellow as might woo my Maid of the Moon! He is himself a piece of shadow. He would never go anywhere but at night. He would sing like this.’

The lines of a Song that flowed as the river flowed began to run in Lucien’s head. Almost everyone was

gone. It was the supper-hour of the good folks of Nantes; and pleasant odours rose even from the boats. Partly the rhymes of the Song, but for the most part a kind of obstinacy, kept Lucien walking up and down till the Italian should move.

Suddenly a boy, with a bundle under his arm, came across the bridge—stood for an instant watching just as Lucien watched—picked up a stone—hit the stake at once—and passed on. The gentleman threw once or twice more without the slightest change of manner, and then strolled quietly away. Lucien felt glad to do the same, for, after all, it was cold by the waterside.

As he was stepping briskly past the Column of Louis XVI. he encountered Stylite.

‘You out at night, mademoiselle? Wonders will never cease!’

‘Madame has given me leave,’ she whispered. ‘It is Eulalie’s birthday; I am going to sleep at home. Céleste will be there too. We have not supped together, all three of us, for four months.’

Lucien looked after her as she went up the street; he loved the movements of ladies. She had not reached the corner when she turned and came back to him.

‘Are you on your way to No. 3?’

‘Yes,’ said Lucien courteously, though he had not intended to go, Madame, as it chanced, having given no invitation.

‘Will you be kind enough to tell Her Royal Highness that I left the new cipher in the lower drawer of the chest, at the end of the passage outside her room? It has no lock. I would go back myself, but if it is not a burden to you——’

‘I shall be delighted.’

Glad at heart at the chance of any service, however small, he hurried back to No. 3. Mademoiselle Pauline was alone in the parlour.

‘May I see Madame?’

Mademoiselle Pauline smiled.

‘She is not at home.’

The look of horror on Lucien’s face made her laugh gently.

‘She wearied so for the fresh air. We thought it could do no harm if she went at dusk.’

‘Which way did she go?’

‘Down by the river. It is quite deserted there. No one ever passes except the bargees; she thinks a man in a boat is stupider than any other kind of man.’

‘Pray Heaven she thinks right!’ said Lucien, with some anxiety. ‘I have just come from the river myself, but I did not see her.’

‘There she is! I hear her voice in the corridor.’

The draught of fresh air had wrought a change in Madame. There was a flush on her cheek, a brightness in her eyes.

‘To think so little can do so much!’ murmured Pauline to Lucien, half pleased, half sorrowful. ‘The meanest beggar may breathe the air she cannot!’

‘Why do you look sad?’ cried the little lady, shaking the rain-drops from the brown cloak in which she had wrapped herself; the hood fell back a little and there was dew upon her hair. ‘No woman in the world is happier than I am. Nantes is the most beautiful town I have ever seen. Just as I was turning homeward, the rain began. Oh, how good it was to feel it beat in my face again!’

‘You are covered with diamonds,’ Lucien said.

‘You will take off your cloak,’ said Mademoiselle Pauline. ‘It is wet.’

She held it tightly across her, laughing.

‘No, no! I am not so lost to all good manners. I will take it off in my room.’

She fled.

‘We will light the fire for her,’ said mademoiselle Pauline. ‘She will be cold when she comes down. What a girl it is! Ah, I wish we knew that she were once in safety! And yet—my sister and I—how we shall miss her! We cannot remember that we are old when she is by. There is a favour we want to ask of you, Monsieur Lucien. Will you dine with us, and—if it is not inconvenient to you—remain here for the night? Monsieur Guibourg does not return before to-morrow. Since he has occupied the room on the ground-floor, we have felt more at ease, for dear monsieur de Mesnard is very deaf. Something has gone wrong with the bolt of the front-door, and it cannot be repaired for a day or two; the locksmith is ill. I did not mention it before Her Royal Highness—she would have said there was no need—but should you object to take monsieur Guibourg’s place?’

‘I shall be happy to do so. I will go back to my lodging early to-morrow, before Madame rises.’

‘Thank you! She will believe that you are returning home as usual after dinner. I sometimes think she tires of watch and ward. See how different she looks to-night because she drew breath freely for half an hour!’

Madame had come in and taken her place by the window to watch the drops of rain.

'Look! look!' she cried. 'Crowds of tiny gray men, bobbing up and down on the pavement—out in the road—over the roofs—everywhere!'

'You would think she had never seen the rain fall before!' said mademoiselle du Guiny, laughing softly.

'I never saw the little gray men. What a hurry they are in about nothing! How human they are! Everything is human to-night.'

'I think so, too,' said Lucien. 'When I was down by the river, he had a voice. I could hear what he said, I know that. And now the wind is rising, he has a voice, too.'

Madame listened.

'It cries like a woman. The wind was a woman once, I am sure.'

'In Germany they say he was a Wild Huntsman.'

'No, no—a woman who had not what she wanted. There is nothing so dreadful for a woman.'

'Your Royal Highness bears it well,' said Lucien, stooping to kiss her hand.

She let him keep it for an instant.

'Do you agree with Pascal?' she asked abruptly. 'If Cleopatra's nose had been half an inch longer, would it have changed the history of the world?'

'Cleopatra would have been Cleopatra still,' said Lucien. 'No one would ever have seen her nose. The world is not governed by noses. Eyes are different. He should have said, "If Cleopatra had squinted _____,"'

Madame did indeed look different. She seemed at all times wonderfully young; that night the years fell away from her.

With subtle fellow-feeling mademoiselle du Guiny

and her sister devoted themselves to the amusement of old de Mesnard, that she might enjoy the society of her boyish companion, and Lucien felt as though he were, for the first time since she had spoken with him at Bellecour, alone with her. The presence of others only secured him against intrusion. They said no word that might not have been overheard by the whole of Nantes, yet they were talking hidden language. In the long pauses when she did not speak, a strong swift current of harmony bore him along, carried them nearer and nearer. So far he had known two people in her—the heroine claiming devout homage—the genial boon companion, whose mirth turned everything in life to laughter; now there awoke a third—a woman mysterious as these were not, weak as they had been strong, irresistible in her weakness. Where she had commanded she now appealed.

‘Tell me,’ said she, ‘are you afraid of growing old?’

‘No,’ said Lucien. ‘I used to be; but now I am afraid of death.’

‘I might have believed it, if you had told me before the fight at la Pénissière,’ she said, and laughed.

The first time she had mentioned the fight! Had she forgiven the marquis?

‘I am not afraid of being shot through the heart some day, if that is what you mean. I should like it—some day. The face is not disfigured.’

He stopped, for he was thinking of René, but the clear vision of René’s face would not return to him—he could see only the duchess.

‘What do you fear, then?’

‘To die before I have finished my Play.’

To his own bewilderment he spoke of it without the

least hesitation. A look of gentle surprise—almost reproach—flitted across her features.

‘Why?’

Lucien considered.

‘I do not know—I want to finish it. If I could finish it, I should not be forgotten.’

‘The love of fame is strong in you. Would you feel the same if you were on a Desert Island, where no one could ever read your fine speeches?’

Lucien broke into a laugh.

‘Why, yes,’ he said; ‘it is very silly, but I should. I want to finish.’

For the first time in their acquaintance she did not laugh when he did.

‘You love the work of your own hands more than anything in this world?’

She asked as if her life depended on the answer.

‘No.’

She was tearing from him a secret which, up to that moment, he had not known himself. His own answer startled him.

‘You love something more?’

He was dumb.

‘Ah!’ she cried. ‘I have fame. I would give it all for—— But I shall soon be old.’

‘Never!’

‘This hair of mine will be gray wires. Here on my forehead Time will rule with his ruler. I hear him always whispering in my ear, “You will grow old.”’

‘He tells a lie.’

Soft tears stood in her eyes.

‘You have read to me from the old poets. To-night I want to hear the youngest of them all—remember!

Sing to me something of your own. I have heard you singing.'

How much may be concealed in a few careless words! In one sense, if she had asked for his life then and there, she would have asked for less.

'How should you choose to die?' she went on.

'Fighting,' said Lucien, 'or else upon the sea. Not in my bed. Not for a little while yet.'

'Not for a little while yet,' she murmured dreamily.

Monsieur de Mesnard left them after dinner. Madame, who had been sitting silent, signed to Lucien to go to the harpsichord.

'Is it safe?' said mademoiselle Pauline, with an anxious glance at her sister. 'We have not played for so long.'

'I do not care. I must have music to-night. I cannot live without it any longer.'

She rose and strayed restlessly hither and thither in the room.

'I will play the "Marseillaise,"' Lucien said. 'No good Republican objects to that.'

'Yes, yes, anything. Only sing.'

'It is quite safe,' said mademoiselle du Guiny. 'The harpsichord is very faint. No one can hear outside.'

One, standing outside in the darkness, did hear, and hid her face in her hands.

'It is a woman,' she said. 'He is singing that to a woman.'

Yet Jeanne had not heard the words; and perhaps no one had heard them. Lucien could not remember them afterwards. He only knew that Madame ceased to wander—that she threw herself into a chair by the harpsichord—that she fixed her eyes on him, hardly

breathing till he had finished; and when he ended, she—so quick to praise—fell silent. He played a few chords.

‘Hush!’ she whispered. ‘That was perfect! Good-night. Nothing more!’

She was struggling with an uncontrollable fear. Her breast rose and fell quickly. She was fighting her own heart, as she had fought more open enemies, and she would not yield.

‘Good-night,’ she said again.

‘Your little walk tired you,’ said mademoiselle Pauline. ‘You are not accustomed to walking now.’

‘Yes,’ she said, with feverish energy. ‘I am tired. Good-night.’

She kissed them as though she had been a girl, putting her arm round mademoiselle du Guiny’s neck, touching lightly mademoiselle Pauline’s forehead, her eyelids, her mouth—and went away.

‘If she were only our child!’ murmured mademoiselle Pauline.

Hour after hour Lucien sat by his bed in the room downstairs. The rain beat on the window, but he took no note of it. He was deaf to the wild call of the wind. Sunk in a dream of ecstasy he had forgotten all the world.

At last, worn out with rapture, he fell asleep, and dreamed no more.

In the middle of the night he awoke with a start of horror.

What was it that he had forgotten?

What was it that someone said beneath the Column of Louis XVI.?

The cipher!

It must be lying still where mademoiselle Stylite had left it.

Oh, special Providence, the night was not yet over! No servant could be stirring yet. He would find it—keep it until the morning.

He took off his shoes that he might make no noise, and stole out, carrying a lighted candle. On tiptoe, not to disturb her, he crept past Madame's door and down the narrow passage. He shivered as he went. It was cold and damp, and draughts from the old-fashioned, ill-fitting windows almost extinguished the flame. At last he made out the chest—found the drawer—withdrew the cipher as quietly as possible—and was about to go downstairs again when a gust of air from the casement above left him in darkness.

There was a crack of light under Madame's door. Was she sitting up late? Had she a lamp always lit? As he groped his way to the head of the stairs, a yellow circle flared out just above; quick, silent as thought, a tall figure came on. Lucien was about to spring forward when the door over the crack opened without a sound—the little white hand was thrust out—seized that of the stranger—drew him within.

The cry that never rang from Lucien's lips had all but riven his heart. He stumbled back against the chest, and sat there stifling through what was left of the hours of the night. When the dawn broke, they seemed short to him; he could have wished them to last for ever. The moment that he dreaded came.

The door opened in the same noiseless way; but this time two figures crept out. They glided down the stairs like ghosts. They were long below—so he thought.

As Madame reappeared on the landing, he caught her face transfigured in the dawn. He rose—not so silently but that she heard him; he came to the head of the stairs. There, for a full minute, they stood fronting each other.

Her eyes, at the first instant blind with terror, took the expression of a hunted thing caught in a trap. Overcome by swift, intolerable pity, he averted his. Then he felt the look turn to one of defiance.

‘I have something to tell you, monsieur Sylvestre,’ she said at last, pride and modesty so blended in her that Lucien could not have told which sent the crimson over cheek and brow. ‘I was married in Rome last winter to the count Lucchesi-Palli. He belongs to an old family—one of the oldest in Sicily.’

Lucien bowed very low. He let her pass to her room and returned to his own.

CHAPTER XXXI

WHO LOVES BEST ?

MADemoiselle JEANNE had waited in vain that night. She saw the windows darkened one after the other ; but Lucien did not leave the house. Tired, sick at heart, she waited. Still no one came. At length, afraid to stay out longer in the rain, she made her way home through the silent streets.

‘ A woman ! a woman ! ’

She could not sleep. As soon as it was light her feet carried her back to a corner where she could watch unseen. She did not think to see Lucien ; but she could not stand there all day, and she could not wait till it was dark to stand there again.

Suddenly, before she knew where she was, he had passed her.

Was it Lucien ?

Never in life had she seen him look thus.

Amazed and terrified by the sudden change, she cast about in her mind to discover what could have happened. Cruel, dumb walls which knew everything that she longed to know, and would not tell her. How she hated the house ! Yet there was something in it that he loved.

Had the marquis been arrested ?

No. He was a marked man since the day at la Pénissière ; the news would have gone ringing through the town.

Was he ill?

No. In that case Lucien would never have left him.

Had he died?

Impossible. Even as she stood there the blinds were pulled up, the curtains drawn aside, the quiet, regular life of the place that she had watched for months began again just as usual. She saw the cook come to the door, take in the milk for the household, smile and laugh at the milkman. She heard the housemaid humming as she scrubbed the steps. Presently mademoiselle du Guiny came out with a covered basket, on her way to the market square. Her calm face bore no signs of disturbance.

Only one person altered! What was it that had done this thing?

The necessities of the day drove Jeanne away at last, but she could not forget, and when the dusk fell she took a sudden resolution that she would go and ask the caretaker at the Castle—she knew by this time that Lucien Sylvestre lodged there—how he was.

‘I will say I am an old friend—I saw him in the street, and thought he looked ill. That is quite true.’

The caretaker was a sympathetic woman, and, in common with most of her sex who came across him, she liked Lucien.

‘Ah, poor young gentleman!’ said she. ‘He is not himself. He is ill. Go up and see him, dear! Your pretty face will do him good. He has no friends at all in Nantes. Nobody ever comes. He has hardly let me enter his room since he came back, and he will not eat. Tell him he will be ill if he goes on like that.’

Jeanne ran quickly up the dilapidated staircase and

knocked. For four long months she had been wondering how she could do this. Now she was frightened at the ease with which she did it.

A careless voice bade her enter, and she thanked God. She had dreaded she knew not what—utter silence.

The windows had been thrown wide open.

Lucien was sitting by the table without fire or lamp.

‘Ah, is it you?’ he said, rising and coming forward to take her hand.

There was a languid pleasure in his recognition at which her heart bounded. Clearly, he thought it natural she should be there.

‘I am ill,’ he went on—‘light-headed, I think. If I say odd things, you will not believe them, will you? You know they are not what I saw; they never really happened.’

‘Oh no!’ said Jeanne. ‘I should not dream of thinking they really happened.’

He drew a long breath of relief.

‘Then it is all well. You will not let anyone else come in, will you? I am sorry the room is too hot, but we must not sit by the window; people would see. You were so good to that poor man who had the fever! Will you put your little white hand on my forehead once—only once?’

A light broke in upon Jeanne. He did not know her; he thought he was talking to the lady who hid behind the curtain at the *château* de Morfontaine. It was she—she who had driven him out of his senses.

‘Will you tear up this for me?’ he went on, pointing to a heap of manuscript, loose and disordered, on the

table. 'Marthe would never understand. I have been trying all day to tear it up. I could not find page 1. There are little black things crawling.'

He looked down with fastidious disgust.

'It used to be white,' he said.

'I will arrange all that for you,' said Jeanne, quickly gathering the papers together. 'Now you must do as I tell you. You are very tired—feverish. Go to bed, and madame Marthe will bring you some good hot soup. To-morrow I will come again.'

'I cannot go to bed; I should dream.'

While she was speaking, Jeanne had closed the windows, drawn the old curtain across, found the matches and lighted a candle. Now she simply repeated her commands as if he had not heard them.

'I will not come again unless you do as I bid you,' she added.

'I will,' he said; 'I will do anything you bid me. Only one question. I know why you did that. I understand. I remember what you said about women and Queens. You could not help yourself; it came to you. But why did you never tell little Céline? Why did you let René fight? They died. You have the dead against you. Why had you no compassion? Why did you never tell?'

'I will explain everything to you by-and-by,' said Jeanne. 'I was quite right; I always am.'

'It is not the marquis, then; it is the niece of the marquis who lives in that house?'

Jeanne had time to ask herself many questions between the first and the last steps of the stairs.

'What has she done to him?'

Her blue eyes grew fierce. In her opinion the niece

of the marquis, in spite of her dramatic defence of the doings of that lady, had not behaved well.

The days that followed were for Lucien as though they had not been; for Jeanne they were full of mystery, excitement, a bitter happiness. She came whenever she was able to spare the time. Since he did not know her, how could it matter? The old woman, glad of her help, did everything to encourage her. She dared not send for a doctor, it appeared; she dared not get in a nurse. It would be as much as her place was worth, if anyone discovered that she was sheltering a man in the Castle.

‘It is better for him to have the fever than be sent to prison and guillotined, poor young gentleman! Besides, this is not cholera. People only die of cholera nowadays.’

Jeanne agreed, or seemed to agree. The old woman was right: what could they do?

As for provisions, they had all that they wanted. Achille Guibourg came often. He had grown very fond of Lucien during the last month, and every few days he brought a flask of brandy and entreated Jeanne to give large and frequent doses of the same. Except about the health of his friend, he asked no questions, and Jeanne, grateful to him because he appeared to take her presence for granted, decided that she would ask none either.

When the shades of evening gathered, one tall, stately lady or another would glide up the stair, bring a bowl of soup or jelly, a lump of ice, a basket of fruit, linger for a while by the bedside, depart as she had come. Neither of these could be the niece of the marquis.

After the first evening Lucien was dumb. Had it not been for a stray utterance now and then, broken or stopped at once as if by some strong effort of the will, they might have thought him incapable of speech. The fancy that Jeanne was that *someone else* of whom he was always thinking did not last. Whether he recognised her or not she could not tell, but every morning when she came in he searched her face with great bright eyes, and every morning turned away from it with a look that cut her to the heart. He was always listening, listening for a footstep outside. A momentary gleam lit up his face when the door opened, only to fade again as Marthe, or Guibourg, or one of the tall ladies, entered.

‘Who is she?’ whispered Jeanne one night when he was very restless.

He shook his head.

‘If she did come, I would not let her in. She has half killed you already.’

Jeanne’s lips formed the word ‘Never,’ though she was not speaking aloud.

But ‘Never’ is a long word, illness is a strange lengthener of time, and time works wonders. Only a day or two after this Jeanne slipped outside the door and caught mademoiselle du Guiny by the sleeve.

‘When is she coming? He will die if she does not come.’

‘My child, she cannot.’

The tall lady put her arms round Jeanne, and Jeanne let herself be soothed by that embracing sympathy, even though the words were a refusal.

‘Have you told her?’

Mademoiselle du Guiny bent her head.

‘Then it is she that will not come. She will not save his life when she could.’

‘Alas! alas! she cannot!’

Mademoiselle du Guiny tightened her clasp of Jeanne, drew her close. It was years since she had cried. They clung together in silence.

‘But if she does come, I will go,’ said Jeanne to herself. ‘I could not stay in the room with her. I hate her!’

Next day Lucien refused all food. He had not slept for three nights.

Mademoiselle du Guiny arrived at the usual hour. When she saw how it was, she signed to Jeanne to follow her out.

‘Can you stay here to-night?’

‘Yes,’ said Jeanne without hesitation.

‘She will come. You will leave the door on the latch. But no one must see her, no one must know. She will be here at eleven. Can you get Marthe out of the way?’

‘Yes.’

Marthe was glad enough to be told to go and lie down for the first part of the night; she asked no questions.

Lucien wandered a little; he was growing weaker. Jeanne fought off the thought of the hour to come, kept herself steadily to the work in hand, and succeeded well until there was nothing more to do. Then a wave of rebellion surged up in her. Why must she stay to see the cruel, coward beauty who had brought Lucien low, and now, when he was at the last gasp, just condescended to cross the road that she might look at him and make him well? That would be the result, Jeanne

had no doubt. She never reckoned all that she had risked herself. There was no merit in it; she could not have done otherwise, that was all. But a fierce contempt filled her soul for the other woman, who risked nothing. Why should it be she—she alone who could heal?

Jeanne checked the raging vehemence of question, terrified by her own hardness. Would she not have given her life that Lucien might recover? Only that morning had she not felt that she could give it, even for a chance that the sight of the one face he desired might soothe him? Had it not been her own resolve that she would bring that face to his bedside, if any earthly power could do so?

‘Oh, I am wicked! I am wicked!’

Hiding her face in her hands, she prayed to be delivered from herself; and still her thoughts raged on beside her prayers.

Was this what it came to, then, to be a great lady? Was this what he must love—a broken reed that ran into his hand and pierced him when he leant on it? She must be beautiful indeed! Perhaps she did not mean to come after all; she might deceive again.

A little figure in a long brown cloak slid through the door, her finger on her lip, and stopped beside the bed. She had come.

Jeanne held her breath—looked.

‘Not beautiful—not even young!’

She could have cried for joy, but the next impulse was to doubt.

‘Can it be she?’

From under the cloak a small white hand stole forth, rested on Lucien’s forehead. He had been lying with

half-shut eyes, now he opened them. He looked at her, shook his head, pointed to the door.

‘No, no, not you! not you! You are ugly!’

The lady covered her face with her hands, and shrank behind the bed. Jeanne moved swiftly towards her, full of sudden compassion.

‘He does not know,’ she whispered.

The little lady drew herself up with such pride that it was Jeanne’s turn to shrink, made the sign of the Cross over the bed, and vanished.

No sooner had the door closed on her than Jeanne flitted to a square of looking-glass hung on the wall, and surveyed her own features.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I am prettier.’

She felt a rush of kindness in her breast that all her praying had not brought her.

From that night Lucien began to improve.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE BARON

‘Who made him a baron, I wonder?’ said Guibourg. ‘I am pretty sure that he did not inherit the honour.’

Lucien smiled with languid amusement. He was much better, though he still looked pale, as he sat in what had been once a very grand arm-chair, found for him by Marthe somewhere in the recesses of the Castle, and supported by an infirm arrangement of stools instead of a fourth leg. Jeanne was by the table, at work upon the tall straight lilies of the Nuns’ banner. She had neglected them of late, and they had not grown so fast as she promised they should; wherefore, every minute was precious. Guibourg had come in to see Lucien, and they were discussing the arrival of a gentleman who called himself the baron de Gonzague, and wished to be received at No. 3.

‘Do you care so much about rank?’ said Lucien.

‘I care about rank because the best blood wins in the end—because it means, as a rule, that the fellow has been brought up in proper surroundings.’

‘I care nothing about that. I was born—no, brought up—in a windmill.’

‘Brought up? Yes, I dare say. Anyone who had had the pleasure of looking at you for two minutes would know that you were not born in a windmill.’

Jeanne glanced away from her work, like a bird

hearing the song of another bird; so she had often thought.

‘It makes little difference,’ Lucien said wearily. ‘We were all born when the world began.’

Guibourg laughed.

‘In the case of the baron the stock has degenerated.’

‘You have seen him?’

‘Yes, I saw him at Mass in the Chapel at the Convent of the Visitation—the place that was recently searched, you remember. He goes to Communion there every day; he has a hoarse voice, but he says the responses with great devotion. The Superior is charmed; she asked me to introduce him, but I declined. There are too many in the secret as it is.’

‘Do you wish me to go?’ broke in Jeanne. ‘I have never been told the secret.’

‘Dear mademoiselle Jeanne,’ said Guibourg readily, ‘you must have guessed it.’

Jeanne smiled.

‘I guessed it a long while ago.’

‘How?’ said Lucien, his face changing. ‘Did I name her?’

‘Never.’

‘How, then?’

‘By her ways. I knew she must be a duchess.’

‘When——?’

‘The night that she came in to see you.’

‘She came?’ said Lucien eagerly—‘she came?’

Jeanne stitched away hard.

‘When?’

‘The night that you slept for the first time.’

She compelled herself to say it, though her voice stiffened with the effort.

'It was like her,' said Guibourg.

Jeanne felt as if the room had grown cold.

Lucien said nothing.

'When did she ever fail in kindness?' Guibourg continued. 'I believe myself, it is out of pure kindness that she will insist on seeing this doubtful member of the nobility.'

'How did she hear of him?'

'Through mademoiselle Céleste, who goes often to the convent. She says she remembers him at Massa. He used to take despatches to Spain.'

'He was the man who carried the letter to Marie-Amélie, then, on behalf of monsieur de Kersabiec. Has that had any result?'

'None, so far as we know. For my own part, I do not feel sure that it was received.'

'There is a man in Nantes now, who took a letter that I had for the duchess of Berry, about four months ago,' said Jeanne. 'I have often wondered whether it reached her hands.'

Both men looked at her, greatly startled.

She had always meant to tell Lucien, and now she saw her chance. In clear, business-like accents she spoke of Blum's return to Lyons; of the initials on the pencil-case; of the intercepted letter from the South, which she believed to be a forgery. She had almost reached Nantes, she said, when a man, whose voice was hoarse and his manner deprecating, yet insistent, accosted her one day on the highroad, informed her that he came from monsieur Thiers, and requested her, in the name of that Minister, to give him the letter. She had no means of resistance, and she saw herself compelled to surrender it, though with a feeling of strong reluctance.

'I had that letter from the South. I gave it to her,' said Lucien. 'It was a forgery, of course.'

'The man is in Nantes now,' said Jeanne. 'I saw him yesterday.'

'If he should be the baron?'

The two friends stared at each other.

'Mademoiselle du Guiny's brother has been ordered off to bring the baron this very night. Such a night, too! Listen to the storm!'

'Is du Guiny acquainted with him?'

'No; he did not like the business. By the way, he was to be at the Hôtel de France by six o'clock, and, if the baron had the other half of a card which Madame had kept, du Guiny was to conduct him down the rue Jean-Jacques, along the road from Pont Maillard, to No. 3. She is rather annoyed with de Mesnard, and with me, for opposing the plan. I think she wearies of her prison; she wants to play a scene to amuse herself. A pity to run risks, though, when she is within an ace of escape.'

'I do not understand. No chance of another rising, is there?'

Jeanne stopped, her needle in her hand.

'About as much as there is of the millennium. But she has yielded at last. To-morrow fortnight she leaves France. The ship is chartered. What is the matter? Are you faint?'

'Nothing! The heat of the room. To-morrow fortnight, did you say?'

'To-morrow fortnight. Well, I must go back; I do not desire that the baron should pay his respects in my absence. Come with me, Lucien; I should like to have your opinion.'

Jeanne leaned forward across the table.

‘He must not—he cannot go. He has hardly breathed the air yet. It is a wild night.’

Lucien rose.

‘In a fortnight, you said?’

‘Do not be disturbed, Mademoiselle! He has only to cross the road; he will return in a few minutes. Seat yourself at the window. I am sure those keen eyes of yours have discernment. I will contrive to carry a lantern for the baron when he comes out. As he passes the moat, I will flash it in his face. You shall tell us if you recognise your companion of the road.’

Jeanne laughed with her lips.

‘Thank-you; I cannot stay.’

Guibourg went on ahead; she touched Lucien’s arm.

‘I have never asked anything else of you. Do not go!’

He looked at her, but there was no response to the entreaty.

‘I must. I shall not be long. Wait for me here!’

With a piece of lead at her breast instead of a heart, Jeanne waited.

They had not set foot outside when Guibourg asked, in the off-hand manner of the young man who has made up his mind to say a difficult thing:

‘Of course you are engaged to that pretty girl?’

‘No, why should I be?’

‘For reasons that should be plain to an honest man.’

Lucien felt as if his trusty friend had turned round and fired a pistol at him twice over.

Was it not enough to have said that Madame was leaving France in a fortnight?

He could not speak, he could not think. He had not considered the violence of the storm without. Weak as he was, he found it hard work to struggle across the road; and yet the dark tranquillity of the house, when once he found himself again within those sheltering walls, was worse to bear.

Guibourg took him up to the room on the third story. The ladies and old de Mesnard greeted him warmly; someone else was there.

‘Has she come?’ said a rough voice that Lucien had heard before, as he sat on an old sunny wall, under a bright blue sky, one day in June. It was the voice of the air, as a letter fell at his feet.

‘Has she come?’ it repeated.

‘You heard the bell ring, did you not?’ said de Mesnard.

‘I will go and see!’ cried mademoiselle du Guiny, mademoiselle Pauline, and Stylite, rising as one woman.

There was a noise of footsteps outside—of opening and shutting—of smothered exclamation. Madame appeared, ceremoniously ushered in by the brother of the two ladies. She was wearing a hat and a thick shawl. The baron staggered back.

‘Here I am, dear Deutz! Be more composed, friend.’

She pushed a chair towards him.

‘Do not go!’ she cried, turning swiftly to Lucien. ‘You will have to take me home again, you know. You will forgive me while I talk to this gentleman?’

Lucien understood that she wanted the baron to

think she had come with him. Guibourg drew him down on to the sofa at the back, as far from the carrier of despatches as space would admit. Du Guiny joined them. All the while Guibourg's question went sounding on in his brain, '*Of course you are engaged to that pretty girl?*'

The duchess and the baron talked to each other in low tones by the window, for a long time as it seemed. Again and again Lucien could not avoid overhearing phrases which whirled round after each other in the tumult of his brain: *Don Miguel—loan of ten million—alms—ammunition—the Queen of Spain.*

The baron appeared to be timidly insisting—Madame resisting—all in the friendliest manner.

At length she rose.

'I must ask you to stay a few minutes longer, while I leave the house,' she said aloud.

The baron fell on his knees before her, lifting the hem of her gown to his lips.

'Eve—the Serpent!'

Lucien was about to spring forward when Guibourg laid a strong hand on his arm.

'Only consent to make me your Plenipotentiary!' murmured Deutz. 'Only confer on me the degree of baron in your illustrious court!' He would have gone further, but trembled so that he could hardly speak.

'Stand up! Stand up, friend!' said Madame. 'We will discuss this matter by-and-by. To-night I cannot spare the time. Here is our kind ally who will convey you back to your Hôtel as soon as I am gone.' She made a sign to du Guiny. 'He will be always at your service, if you have anything further to communicate.'

'You will find me at No. 2, Place de la Préfecture.'

My rooms are on the third floor,' du Guiny said. 'We have light here, and that is not always the case with conspirators. Let us look well at each other, sir, that I may be sure to know your face and you may be sure to know mine!'

The baron seemed to be doubtfully convinced of the wisdom of this precaution. He raised his eyes for an instant and let them fall again at once.

'Monsieur du Guiny is a good Breton,' said the duchess. 'You may have perfect confidence in him. There are no bounds to his devotion.'

She signed to Lucien to lead her out, as du Guiny had led her in. He found a tiny scrap of paper in his hand when she withdrew hers, and instantly concealed it.

'You will follow me in five minutes' time,' she called through the door.

An awkward pause followed.

Deutz knelt on, still covering his face with his hands. No one knew whether to sit or stand, whether to stay or to depart. The same noises that had preceded Madame's supposed arrival preceded her supposed departure. A sickening conviction that they would never deceive anyone crept over Lucien.

'Shall we go?' said du Guiny, and marshalled the baron out.

'Pouf!' cried Guibourg. 'Open the window, Lucien. Why should he turn pale when du Guiny looked at him? Shyness, perhaps—he's no beauty! What was that? Madame laughing! Ah well, I have not heard her laugh for many a long day! *A quelque chose malheur est bon.*'

She entered, chatting gaily with de Mesnard.

‘So that is what he said to you!’ she cried, throwing herself back in a chair. ‘He is mad. He wants to be my “Plenipotentiary”—he wants to be a baron. Well, let him pass for a baron! Let us make him a baron!’

‘Plenipotentiary to the Shades of Night!’ thought Lucien. The expression sounded familiar.

‘I always thought his baronetcy wanted confirmation,’ observed Guibourg.

‘His affection needs none. No one ever kissed the hem of my skirt before.’

‘I only hope he did not see what I did—that Your Royal Highness’s skirt was remarkably clean for a skirt that had been taking a walk in the same direction as Your Royal Highness’s boots.’

‘Dear Monsieur Guibourg, he is not a born detective as you are.’

‘I do not understand how Your Royal Highness can possibly trust him,’ put in de Mesnard. ‘In my opinion he is a traitor.’

‘What is your opinion, Monsieur Lucien?’

Lucien’s voice shook.

‘Madame, it agrees in every point with that of Monsieur de Mesnard.’

Her face clouded over.

‘But he was recommended to me by more than one of the Cardinals.’

‘Indeed!’ said Guibourg politely.

‘By the Pope himself!’

No one said anything.

She grew impatient.

‘In short, I trust him as I should one of yourselves.’

All three were silent.

‘Heavens!’ cried Guibourg. ‘I forgot the lantern. They cannot have crossed the courtyard yet. Lucien, the lantern!’

A minute or two afterwards Jeanne, watching at her window, saw the light flash upon the face of the timidly insistent man who had taken the letter from her on the highroad to Nantes.

CHAPTER XXXIII

JEANNE REFUSES

THERE was no doubt left in her mind. He was Thiers' agent.

What if Lucien were taken? This very night some dreadful, inevitable thing might occur.

She was putting on her hat when Guibourg burst into the room; she could have fallen on her knees when she saw Lucien behind him.

'Well, Mademoiselle Jeanne! What of the baron?'

'He is the man who met me on the road.'

'One of Thiers' spies. I thought as much. So did you——'

Guibourg turned to his friend abruptly.

Lucien nodded.

'Her Royal Highness must be warned at once.'

'He does not know that she is living at No. 3. He thinks she came from a long distance.'

'Does he, I wonder?' said Guibourg. 'He must be very simple if he does—simpler than I take that fellow to be. A man who could deceive Madame—and let a hat and shawl and a pair of muddy boots deceive him! Of course he acts badly. I thought at one moment it could not be acting at all. No, do not come with me, Lucien. You are not fit for any more detective work to-night.'

'I must know.'

'Let us have a signal! You see the centre window

of the parlour? She may decide that nothing can be done at present; she may decide on active measures. If the blind rises twice, I will come over to you as soon as I can. If it rises only once, you will know that I am going to bed, and you will have the goodness to follow my example. You were right, Mademoiselle Jeanne! I ought not to have taken him. Give him some brandy.'

Lucien was indeed white as a sheet. He did not ask Jeanne to stay; he seemed to forget her; but when she had put on her hat and jacket and bidden him good-night, he pointed to the window across the road and said:

'Stay!'

Two notes were crushed together in his hand—Madame's, and another from the marquis, which mademoiselle du Guiny had given him.

A few minutes later the blind was slowly raised and lowered; it did not rise again.

'I must go home now.'

'Wait—wait a moment! Why are you in such a hurry? Your lilies are not finished.'

'I cannot finish them to-night; I hate lilies!'

Lucien continued to gaze out of window.

'Mademoiselle Jeanne,' he said slowly, 'you have been good to me. You have done for a friend what few women would have done except for a lover—or for the love of God. I want to ask you this—will you take me, your friend, for your husband?'

'No,' said Jeanne, as she would have answered an indifferent question, her voice neither raised nor lowered.

This—the question of questions to her—was to him

indifferent. She knew that; still, it was well for her that she could not see the look of relief on his face. Had she done so, the word she added in her heart might have been a longer word than *Not yet*.

'You will let me be your brother?' he said—more grateful to her now than at any previous moment of his life. He longed to give her something.

Jeanne nodded assent. She was full of horror at herself because she shrank.

Quicker to feel than to understand, he knew dimly that he had said a cruel thing, and distress—for he was gentle of heart—confused him and made him blunder worse.

'I used to think that I honoured women too little to love them,' he explained, with fervent conviction. 'You have changed that. I think I honour them now too much.'

If Jeanne had not laughed, she must have cried. She took the braver part and laughed—more than was needful.

Lucien, though bewildered as to the cause of her amusement, breathed again; he could not have hurt her much, if she laughed.

'But why?' said he. 'I cannot tell you how grateful I am.'

'Oh, not that, not that!' she cried, and the laugh changed into another sound.

'Why not?'

Jeanne plucked up courage. She was on safe ground now—she could speak.

'Brothers and sisters are never grateful to each other.'

'Are they not? I never had any. I do not know.'

‘They know. It is a matter of course. If you were really my brother, you would not think of being grateful.’

‘I never did think of it before to-night,’ said Lucien, musing.

‘Then do not think of it any more, Monsieur Sylvestre.’

‘I will not, if you will call me Lucien.’

‘Very well.’

‘“Very well—*Lucien!*”’

‘Very well, Lucien!’

‘And I shall call you Jeanne,’ said Lucien, much satisfied with the result of the discussion.

He had done as honour, in the person of Guibourg, bade him, without hesitation—not without a tremor. It was easy to be Mademoiselle Jeanne’s brother; the arrangement defined the character of their intercourse well and pleasantly. As for the mere thought of marriage, that was terrible. He felt no certain assurance that Mademoiselle Jeanne’s husband could write. He shuddered when he looked down the abyss to the edge of which Guibourg’s mistake had brought him.

‘Are you cold?’

Lucien considered whether he was or not, and decided in the affirmative.

Jeanne closed the window and went.

Thinking is a tedious affair for people who feel often and vividly, and, from the bent of nature, rely more on their intuitions than on their reason. The process seems to them obscure, the result uncertain, compared with the brilliant assurance of the lightning flashes to which they are accustomed. *If I had known*, they say in piteous accents afterwards.

If I had known, Lucien might have said, had he seen, but a few paces from him, Jeanne shaken with the rush of swift, overwhelming, momentary tears as she clutched her arms together to keep them down. However, see he could not. There was a piece of wood between them—and more than that.

He would think about her some other time, he said to himself—not now. She had prevented the fulfilment of his burning wish to read Madame's note. He could not open it while she was there. It lay in his hand, a mute protest against his very words to her. Yet now that she was gone he dared not read it, and he broke the seal of the other note first.

There were only three words in it: '*Come at once.*'

His first instinct was—to obey. He would go this night—this minute. He would not read Madame's note till he had taken a seat in the *diligence*.

No, no, impossible to wait so long! He tore it open.

'On the night of the 6th we keep the Feast of St. Charles, my patron Saint. Dine with me at half-past five.
M. C.'

Swiftly the marquis was swept away, as though he had not been.

Lucien hid the scrap of paper under his pillow, and while it lay there he could not sleep. The charm of the little white hand that had rested on it shot through his blood like flame.

He rose. He burnt it in a candle. Then he could not sleep because he had burnt it.

No wonder that, in the course of the following day, Jeanne received a message from Guibourg to the effect that her patient was very unwell again.

She hurried to the Castle.

Backed by Guibourg, who was alarmed at the result of the former night's imprudence, she enforced her orders, and Lucien was not allowed to stir. Twice, when neither of his gaolers happened to be present, he tried to go as far as the door, and, having failed through sheer weakness, gave in with what grace he might. Had he wished to leave Nantes, he could not have done so.

On Sunday evening Jeanne reported that she had seen the baron again in the Nuns' Chapel.

'He wants another interview, plague take him!' said Guibourg. 'The sight of Madame, it seems, made such an impression that he forgot to give her news of Our Sovereign Lord and Master, Henri Cinq, and his august sister. I reminded her of Mademoiselle Jeanne's story; she would not listen. De Mesnard implored her to have nothing further to do with him; it was of no avail. She is mad to hear of her children. I believe she will see him on Tuesday.'

On the Monday night Lucien revived somewhat, and took a sudden resolution. He did not feel strong enough to argue the matter with Jeanne (there were drawbacks to the possession of a sister, he found), but no power on earth would keep him from going to meet Madame the following day, and therefore he resolved on flight until such time as argument could be of no avail. Watching his opportunity next morning, while Marthe was out of the way, he stole up to the roof of the Castle by a little snail-like stair in the wall, and there remained. The air was pleasant—he had taken care to bring bread and meat—and he enjoyed an elfin sense of security. It rather amused him to see Jeanne

arrive, to imagine her bewilderment when she found the bird flown; he had not the least idea that she would feel hurt. He could not see the tears that made her blind in the bright autumn sunshine when she came out into the street.

He was thinking about Madame, about 'the Good Duchess,' who had stayed in the Castle hundreds of years before; about her marriage with Louis XII., father of his people.

The reverie lasted long. He was roused from it by the strains of a military band in the distance.

'Unusual at this hour!' he thought. 'I wonder what they are doing?'

It was near sunset when he caught sight of Guibourg coming across, and descended to his own room.

'Any news?'

'Yes. But where have you been? Your nurse is in a fine state of anxiety about you.'

'I went to take the air. I start for Paris to-morrow, and I must practise breathing first. I have been shut up five days in this hole.'

'That was not the reason. You went because you mean to dine with Madame to-night, and you knew Mademoiselle Jeanne would dissuade you.'

'Now, how the deuce did you know that?'

'She told me herself.'

'Then, how the deuce did she know it?'

'Hum!' said Guibourg.

'She does not care for me. You were quite mistaken.'

Guibourg's eyebrows went up, and his shoulders likewise.

'I asked her to marry me, and she refused. I am

not at all sorry that I did it. We are going to be brother and sister.'

'Oh!' said Guibourg. 'I congratulate you. A very good temporary arrangement. How if someone else asked her to be his wife? Would she still continue to be your sister?'

'Of course.'

'Oh!' said Guibourg again.

'Could you not say *Ah!* for a change, my dear fellow?'

'No. I appeal to Time, father of truth.'

'Come, your news!'

'Madame saw Deutz again in the same room, in the same way, only an hour ago.'

'Heavens!'

'You may well say that.'

'He had only just arrived when a letter in white ink was brought upstairs. De Mesnard wetted it, and she read it aloud. It came from a person with the exquisite name of *Jauge*. She was warned to be on her guard, because a man whom she trusted completely had betrayed her—sold her to monsieur Thiers.

'“Perhaps you are the man?” she said, smiling, to the baron.'

'And he?'

'Oh, he smiled back again, and said, “Possibly.”'

'*Jauge!* And what next?'

'Long stories about the children. But the finale was always the same. He wanted money—money for Paris, money for Spain, money for Portugal. Madame told him she could not give it. I think she tired of protestations, for she walked out of the room after a dozen of them, and left de Mesnard to maintain her

offer of twenty-five louis to go to Paris, and a letter of credit. As soon as my honest friend found he could get no more than that, he was mighty anxious to depart; but he condescended to take the despatches. I do not think we shall see any more of him.'

'I do not agree with you. He is like a burr. He sticks.'

'We are quit of him for one night, anyhow. Well, I must be going! Do not come, Lucien. Mademoiselle Jeanne thinks that something is going to happen. I think so, too.'

'The duchess invited me. A royal invitation is a command.'

'I have told her that you are not well enough. They have only laid places for two.'

'You may say what you like. I am well and strong; but if I were a dying man I should go.'

'Well, so should I! But if there were anyone so anxious about me as that pretty girl is about you, I should think twice.'

'I cannot. It is not my habit. And I desire that you will leave my sister's name out of this conversation.'

'Good! I have done as I promised her. Make haste! Madame de Charette and the elder mademoiselle de Kersabiec are expected. Brush your hair, for goodness' sake! You look as if you had been sitting in a haystack.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

CAN IT BE?

A LONG ray of the moon lay right across the floor of the chamber, lighting up a great armchair on which the duchess knelt in a position that was unusual with her, her arms folded on the back of it, her white face dreamy with emotion.

‘Hush!’ she said in a whisper. ‘Come here. Look! No—do not light the candles.’

Lucien remained beside her. Guibourg went forward and stood looking down into the street.

Everything lay bathed in a flood of silver, everything except the strong, thick walls of the Castle, which had gathered into itself all the blackness that the moon had left, and rose, a fort and stronghold of the dark, against the pure, unclouded sky.

‘Too beautiful!’ she whispered. ‘It will not last.’

She sprang down from the chair.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, I invite you all to a supper in the moon!’ she cried.

Guibourg did not seem to hear, for he stood still in the same attitude. Was it the moon that made him look so pale? Suddenly his voice rang through the room.

‘Fly, Madame, fly!’

The moon was flashing on a line of serried bayonets at the far end of the street. Each moment they were drawing nearer in perfect silence. So dumb they were

that not a child had come to window or door anywhere.

‘Five minutes to decide!’ said Guibourg.

‘The secret chamber——’

‘Yes. There is no choice. Come with me, Stylite—Monsieur de Mesnard—Monsieur Guibourg! We are proscribed. We stand or fall together. Monsieur Sylvestre——’

‘I go with you,’ said Lucien.

‘No, no. To be found with me is death to you—You are not proscribed.’

‘I cannot reach the Castle. I shall compromise these ladies if I stay here.’

‘Lucien is right, Madame,’ said Guibourg.

De Mesnard was old. He needed a younger arm for the defence.

She reflected.

‘Madame, there is not a moment to lose.’

‘Come, then—but on one condition! I am responsible for the other three—I can protect them. I cannot protect you. Promise me, if any chance of escape offers, that you will take it.’

‘Promise, for goodness’ sake, promise! There is no chance,’ added Guibourg in a whisper.

Lucien promised. He saw de Mesnard take a lump or two of sugar from a basin that stood on the table and drop it into his pocket. Monsieur de Mesnard was a person who always thought of breakfast-time at supper.

‘The white portfolio!’ cried the duchess. ‘Give me that.’

‘The money.’

‘It is there already—we keep it there,’ said Stylite.

‘Quick!’

They dashed up the staircase into the garret. There was nothing in the grate, and by chance the panel had been left open.

‘Here—behind the fireplace! In with you! Go first, Monsieur de Mesnard—to the left, it rises on the left—you are the tallest. Monsieur Guibourg—Lucien—Stylite—nonsense, Stylite, go forward! If you were a good tactician, you would know that the general marches last in a retreat.’

Upon her hands and knees she crept behind, and closed and bolted the sliding panel.

‘What am admirable contrivance it is!’ said Guibourg.

‘For rats—yes!’

She laughed nervously.

‘Céline would not have let her do it,’ thought Lucien.

In the thick darkness they were mere voices to each other—scarcely that—for though they knew they could not be heard, they whispered.

For hours, it seemed, they remained silent.

‘How still it is! Are we the only people left alive? Perhaps the Judgment Day has come. “In an hour that ye know not——” Hark! that was a trumpet!’

‘And that was a man,’ said Guibourg, as a grinding shriek, ‘*A bas, Caroline!*’ made her put her hands to her ears. ‘I think, if Your Royal Highness will forgive me for saying so, the Judgment Day has not come yet.’

‘Fiends of Hell!’ muttered de Mesnard, as the thunder of shouts and execrations redoubled.

‘Oh to be at the throat of one of them!’

Guibourg clenched his fists.

‘I did not know that I was hated so much.’

‘No one could be loved as you are—and not hated,’ said Lucien, so that she only should hear.

He began to understand the sensations of the blind. On the further side of the panel there were no visible men—there were blows and voices; on his own side, whispers merely. They pressed against each other; each felt the other tremble. They thought the house was coming down about their ears in the uproar that followed. Stamping, trampling, banging, swearing, screaming—‘I shall be deaf next!’ thought Lucien.

‘Have they let loose the Mad Asylum?’

‘What was that?’

‘The crack of a pistol.’

‘Are they fighting?’

‘Impossible! There is no one to fight with.’

A stern voice made itself heard from below.

‘Dog! idiot! There is no knowing what a police-inspector will do next. Shot his own elbow, did he? Order! order! or I shoot every one of you.’

A momentary lull; the storm broke forth again with greater fury. There was a sound of crashing glass, of crockery smashed on the ground.

‘Order, I say!’ cried the same indignant voice.

‘Take the maid to the barracks of the *gendarmérie*. Interrogate her there!’

‘She is as safe as her mistresses. She loves me. Marie will never tell,’ said Madame.

‘Escort Mademoiselle de Kersabiec and her sister to their own house,’ continued the voice. ‘Do not leave them.’

‘“And her sister”?’ whispered Stylite. ‘Ah, yes, I understand! Madame de Charette has taken my name.’

‘Dearest, that you were in her place!’

‘I would not change,’ said Stylite. ‘Listen; they are on the stairs; they are coming.’

Lucien held his breath as the soldiers flung open the door and rushed into Madame’s own apartment.

‘This was the audience chamber,’ said a hesitating, craven voice on the other side of the partition. ‘Here is the letter signed *Jauge*.’

Madame shuddered.

‘He is not French—my one comfort; he is a Jew, a German Jew.’

‘They are breaking the cabinet.’

‘They will find nothing there. The white portfolio is safe.’

‘Lights! lights! What has become of the sappers? Send for a mason; bid him bring all his men!’ cried the officer. ‘Have you searched every bed? every cupboard? We may have to take up the floor.’

‘It is possible, sir, that the duchess may have taken refuge in the adjoining garden.’

‘Right! Surround the houses on each side. Garrison No. 1 and No. 5. Have the general’s directions been carried out?’

‘Yes, sir. Lorrière and his men are in front. The general himself is coming up by the rue Basse du Château. The 56th will not be left alone.’

‘That is well. Draw a cordon all round. Let no one go in or out. Twelve hundred men against one woman! We are the laughing-stock of Europe if we fail. Where is the architect? Is it possible, sir, that there could be a hiding-place here?’ and, marching straight into the garret, he laid his hand on the mantel-shelf.

The little company huddled closer together.

‘Quite impossible,’ said the clear voice of the architect. ‘Comparing the formation of the inner with that of the outer wall, it is absolutely impossible that there could be room, even for one.’

‘I did not know that I had a friend amongst architects,’ whispered Madame gleefully.

‘Into No. 5, then! Try there.’

‘Here, Master Mason!’ cried a more rasping organ. ‘Sound those walls thoroughly. Oh, it is not that I distrust your word, sir, but we are bound to take every precaution! The devil is not more cunning than the duchess of Berry.’

‘I wish that were true!’ she sighed.

‘It is Maurice Duval; I know him well—the ruffian!’ said Guibourg.

‘I think, Monsieur le préfet’—they heard the gentle tones of Mademoiselle du Guiny—‘that I have a right to protest against this destruction of my house and property.’

‘If the workmen destroy your house, they are quite capable of building it up again,’ said Duval. ‘Out of the way, or we shall all be smothered!’

The men, under the guidance of the master mason, were tapping and sounding the walls in every direction. Clouds of dust, penetrating through chinks that were almost invisible, half choked Lucien.

‘Bah! I never knew what plaster tasted like before,’ muttered Guibourg. ‘It is not pleasant, though very Homeric, to bite the dust. It is classical, do you think, Lucien—or romantic?’

‘Classical! classical! There is no such thing as dust in the Romantic School.’

The duchess did not respond. In agony she listened to the hard breathing of her companions. Neither Stylite nor de Mesnard had spoken for some time. Fierce blows began to descend on the other side of them. Suddenly she gave way; they heard a low sob.

'My children, we shall be cut to pieces. It is all over, and it is for my sake that you are here—here in this horror.'

'We can bear anything—only not to see you weep, Madame,' said Lucien.

'Anything!' echoed Guibourg.

'Pray to the Saints,' murmured Stylite, trying to soothe her.

'I cannot pray, Stylite! I dare not!'

'They must break through the outer wall in another moment; I felt it shake,' said de Mesnard. 'If they do, we shall have to give ourselves up. We are between two perils; the worst is on this side. If they hear our voices, they will not wait to think; they will fire.'

'Hush! I will open the panel,' said Madame.

She laid her hand upon the bolt; she hesitated.

'Not yet—not for five minutes.'

Again the outer wall trembled.

She pushed the bolt, but drew it back.

'One more blow of the hammer; it falls.'

She leant forward. Lucien could hear her praying:

'St. Anne! Dear St. Anne! Holy Mother!'

The blows stopped all at once.

'You have done enough for to-night,' said the voice of the officer. 'The troops have been ordered into barracks. Let two of the police guard every room! The rest may go. I shall return early to-morrow.'

Madame leant back, gasping.

'A miracle!' whispered Stylite.

'She came. I knew she would. It is Saint Anne. Do not speak. Let me thank her!'

'Your Royal Highness will be exhausted without some nourishment,' said de Mesnard. 'May I entreat you to take this? There is some sustenance in sugar.'

She laughed a little when she felt the two lumps of sugar on the palm of her hand. Stylite refused to touch them, and more to please her friend than for any other reason, she consented.

'Delicious!' she murmured.

She knew that the old man would feel strengthened because she had sucked his lumps of sugar.

'Would you not have known that Monsieur de Mesnard would have something in his pocket?' Guibourg whispered to Lucien.

They heard the voices grow faint, and fainter, the steps depart. One miracle had happened, surely another must.

Yet, as time passed, and they lived on into the dreadful hour after midnight, Lucien felt his heart sink.

'How cold it is!' said Stylite, shivering. 'I suppose the mists are out by the river.'

He wished she had not spoken. Until she did, he had been unconscious that his feet were blocks of ice.

The mists are out by the river. Oh to be there! to breathe! to stretch one's limbs! to cry aloud!

'A good fire and plenty of logs now!' said Guibourg. 'I used to think you kept the room too hot, Monsieur de Mesnard. Never again shall I think that!'

'Hush! there is someone coming!'

'As cold as Christmas!' said a rough voice in the garret. 'The mists are out by the river.'

‘A good fire now; but there’s nothing to make a fire with in this accursèd hole!’

‘There are peats down in the hall. If you were worth your rations, you’d fetch them up.’

‘Catch me!’

‘Well, I don’t care if I do it myself—that is, if you keep the first watch. Mind, I don’t stir a minute earlier than four!’

‘All right, I’m your man.’

With muttered oaths the first fellow tramped down the stairs, and returned with a bundle of peats, which he and his fellow proceeded to arrange in the grate.

‘How many are there? I can’t rightly make out.’

‘There’s Caroline—that’s one; and an old count that goes here, there, and everywhere with her—that’s two; and young Guibourg—him that broke prison in August.’

‘That’s three. The table was laid for eight. Well, the old ladies and poor old Kersabiec’s daughters! They ought to have had more sense. I knew their mother well—a decent, civil-spoken lady she was!’

‘There’s a mistake somewhere. I know those girls as well as I know my own face. One’s gone home all right. That other woman is no more like a daughter of Kersabiec than I am.’

‘She’s made off with the duchess, then. There’s the eight places for you!’

‘They’ll make short work of Caroline when they do catch her. There’s my cousin, the big butcher in the Place St. Jean; he lost a fine son at la Pénissière. He’s sworn to be revenged. And Dammartin, the green-grocer down by the New Bridge, both his nephews are gone—shot down like vermin in Maine, and their

mother a poor widow! Dammartin has to allow her three francs a week. She's a damned hussy, that Bourbon woman! She'll go to hell, that's certain! Duchess or no duchess, they do when they're as bad as that.'

'Now for my part,' said number two as he rubbed the flint on the tinder-box, 'I like Caroline. After all, she's a woman and a mother. And I remember as if it were yesterday one morning when I was on guard at the Tuileries—it was a foggy morning enough—and she looks up at the sun, as he was doing his best to shine, and, "Poor old fellow!" says she. Upon my word, it never struck me the sun was old before. But it's true, for all that. Pretty little boots she had on, too—fur round the top.'

'And that's all you know about it!' returned number one. 'She won't have fur round her boots when she comes to die.'

'That may be or it may not,' quoth number two. 'All the same, I like Caroline. Caroline's the woman for me.'

'Bless the man!' whispered the duchess, as he flung himself down on his camp-bed with a resounding yawn.

'Warmth! warmth! how good!' cried Stylite under her breath.

The fire that had been lit for two warmed seven now.

For the first time for some hours Lucien saw. A chink turned to a thread of flame, then darkened.

'It is well enough now—but by-and-by?'

A few minutes later, the stuffy peat-smoke, pouring through a hole which they had not perceived, became all but unbearable. De Mesnard thrust his hand up cautiously through the rafters above his head and dis-

placed a slate or two, by which means a tiny opening was contrived. They laid their mouths to it in turn. Lucien began to wonder if he were really there at all, if the delirium of fever had not come back.

‘Listen!’ gasped Madame. The other is snoring now. He will forget to keep up the fire.’

She was right.

Gradually the sliding panel cooled, and the wall behind; they breathed more freely again.

The knocking on the other side had ceased. Deep stillness fell upon the house. Every sound died away. Even the sentries at last slept without noise. A slow, slow terror, more dreadful than anything he had felt yet, crept upon Lucien in the dark.

What was it? Why did she not speak?

He was listening intently for a word, a whisper, from Madame; everyone else was listening too; it did not come.

Stylite called to her softly; there was no response.

‘Has she fainted?’

‘Has the smoke stifled her?’

‘Is she dead?’

‘I cannot bear it!’ said de Mesnard, and grasped her arm roughly.

She had fallen fast asleep, standing. Now she awoke with a start. De Mesnard apologized.

‘Do not distress yourself, dear friend. These are perhaps the last free moments that I shall spend in life. I do not want to lose them. But I was tired; it came upon me suddenly. It will sometimes, when I have been excited. You cannot endure to stand any longer; you will fall. Sit down; we will make room for you.’

De Mesnard stumbled forward as she spoke. The

irksomeness of the position was greater for him than for the rest, seeing that his height prevented him from standing upright. They shifted themselves as well as they could, to let him sink upon the floor.

‘If Your Royal Highness would but allow one of us to take your place?’ said Guibourg. ‘You are nearer the fire than anyone.’

‘No, no,’ she laughed. ‘That is my only title to honour now. You could not ask me to resign that!’

Silence fell again; more slowly than ever went the long, leaden-footed hours. They spoke little, every power, every faculty concentrated on mere endurance. At length even that wore thin. How long? How long? How long?

A horrid fear that he was losing manhood possessed Lucien. If he could but breathe! This lack of air—of simple air—was turning him to a beast. There came a moment when he could have knocked down Guibourg to force his way out. He wrung his hands together.

‘Guibourg!’

‘Well?’

‘I think my senses are going. If I go mad—if I scream—choke me.’

‘Of course,’ said Guibourg. ‘You will do the same by me, if I behave like a donkey.’

And, lo! the horror vanished at a word. It might be that the strength of life was running low; but the desire to struggle melted away in peace—the spirit, tired of its wild fluttering, thankfully rested. Lucien reached a stage where everything, without the need of definite thought, grew clear—more than clear, softly bright. He dreaded any movement.

‘Odd,’ said Guibourg. ‘I never was happier in my life than I am now.’

‘Nor I,’ said Lucien, under his breath.

‘And I never was colder,’ continued Guibourg. ‘I feel too cold to shiver. It must be early morning.’

‘I think, if I could hear a cock crow, I should not be so cold,’ murmured Stylite.

‘There they are again! But they are not knocking with such a will as before. The night has gone faster for those poor fellows than for us, I bet you.’

‘They may not be knocking so hard,’ said de Mesnard, ‘but I, who am deaf, hear them better. They must be concentrating their forces round us.’

‘Right. Hulloo! They have broken through—they will see the loose slates.’

They did see; but no suspicions were aroused.

‘Is it possible that I have friends among the soldiers, too?’ whispered Madame.

‘They are returning to the garret. They must have waked the sentries.’

Once more the hiding-place resounded with the strokes of hammers here, there, everywhere, over, under, on every side of the sliding panel—never upon it. Once more the loosened plaster came through in clouds of dust.

‘Another blow—and——’

A bell rang. The workmen trooped off to breakfast in a body.

‘No, they will never find Madame,’ whispered Guibourg. ‘It is the will of God that she should be saved.’

‘Amen.’

‘We have no enemies now, except weariness and hunger.’

‘Courage!’ she murmured.

Only the cold of the morning, not the light! What better test of courage is there?

The captives proved wrong in their conjecture; the excellent *gendarmes* had been little disturbed by the masons. After a long interval of quiet, however, he who had but slumbered gave him who had slept a good shaking, and observed that it was his turn now.

Grumbling and groaning, the sleepy guard vacated his couch, and strove to revive the ashes of the fire, which were still a-glimmer. No success attended his efforts till he discovered a bundle of newspapers at the bottom of one of the cupboards, and threw them on.

In a moment volumes of thick smoke forced their way into every hole and cranny. The masons had cracked the wall of the chimney; the sliding panel, not yet cool, quickly became red-hot.

Lucien put forth all his strength in an attempt to force Madame aside and to take her place, but she stood firm, and it was all he could do not to trample on de Mesnard in the recoil. Guibourg and Stylite vainly entreated. She could not speak, she was breathing hard and fast, but she would not give way. In vain they strove to press themselves back against the wall that they might leave more space round her.

‘Your Royal Highness must open the panel,’ urged de Mesnard. ‘You have done enough for your honour.’

‘No, no!’ she gasped.

A smell of burning followed. Her stuff dress had caught fire. By the quick flare Lucien saw the faces of his companions as if they were already dead. He

did not know Madame. She put out the flame with her hands.

‘Open, open! You must open it now!’ cried de Mesnard.

‘She must! She will die if she does not!’ exclaimed Stylite in agony. ‘Oh, Monsieur Sylvestre, tell her, tell her she must indeed!’

Lucien made no answer.

‘Monsieur Guibourg, save her, save her! Say that she must!’

‘Madame is the only judge,’ said Guibourg. ‘I am Her Royal Highness’s to command.’

Denser and yet more dense grew the air. The loud breathing of the others frightened her who had no fears for herself.

‘Oh, God! Must I give myself up?’

The burning heat dried burning tears of anger as they fell.

Another flash—a stronger smell of burning—again her skirt was on fire. As she struggled to put it out, she touched the bolt of the sliding panel, and a crack opened. Stylite instinctively attempted to push the bolt—burnt her hand—and drew back.

‘Hulloa!’ cried the guard. ‘Rats—rats in the chimney. Wake up, Dick!’ and he drew his sword, laughing.

Neither of them laughed when the panel was seen to move a second time. It moved, but, swollen with the heat, it did not open. Someone kicked it from behind.

‘Who is there?’

‘We yield—we will come out. Extinguish the fire.’

It was Stylite’s voice.

Another vigorous kick from Guibourg, who did

nothing by halves, sent down the panel. The sentries hurriedly dispersed the flaming papers.

‘The duchess?’

‘Yes—I, myself. You are Frenchmen—soldiers. I rely on your honour.’

There she stood, a little pale ghost in her brown stuff dress and her list slippers. The hand that she held out was furrowed with burns. The old soldiers of the Guard knelt down before her; they kissed it, trembling.

‘Is there a chance?’ Guibourg whispered.

A fancy that she might, with the help of these men, escape over the roofs, while they gave themselves up, seized him in its grip.

She smiled and shook her head.

‘Which of you was lying on the camp-bed between midnight and four o’clock this morning? This fellow? There are thirteen hundred francs in gold for him. The bag, Stylite! This is the last chance I shall ever have of rewarding a friend.’

The sentinel stood open-mouthed.

‘Speak to him, Monsieur Guibourg!’

‘You see that we are all here,’ said Guibourg, addressing the men with great firmness. ‘You will bear witness that we were found without arms. Her Royal Highness is in an exhausted condition. She desires to speak with the general immediately. Go, one of you, and tell him; the other keep guard outside the door of Her Royal Highness.’

They did as they were bid.

‘Now, Lucien, into the next room; as soon as they enter this one, walk down the stairs and out into the street. Those fellows are bewildered—they do not

know how many they have seen; but the authorities expect to find four, and four they will find. Our names are familiar; there is no chance of escape for us. There is an excellent chance for you, and you can help us from without. You heard what that man said.'

His voice sank to a whisper that could not be heard by the others.

'They will try to tear her limb from limb. I shall be helpless. De Mesnard is of no use. I only beg you to do what I would do myself, if I could. Wait about the door. Make a diversion when she comes out. Get yourself arrested—anything! It is the post of greater danger. Go!' he added aloud.

'Go, Lucien, I command you!' cried the duchess. 'Remember your promise.'

'Go!' said Stylite and de Mesnard.

Lucien walked slowly down the stairs through a rabble of men and officers, crowding, pushing, struggling, fighting their way along, not one of whom so much as perceived him.

He passed Dermoncourt, who had lost every trace of composure. He passed mademoiselle du Guiny, white and resolute, on the threshold of her own bedroom. The men who had been sent to guard it were rushing upstairs with the rest. She started as he came down, but gave no other sign of recognition.

'The parlour!' she cried. 'Is no one left to guard the parlour?'

Nobody paid the slightest heed to her except Lucien, who felt sure, especially as it was not repeated, that the exclamation had been meant for his guidance. He stumbled into the room, his head swimming, his knees shaking under him. Someone had partaken of

copious refreshment there overnight. The table was littered with food.

Justifying to himself his excessive greed by the curious reflection that he would probably be killed in the next five minutes, Lucien seized a piece of bread and meat, poured himself out a brimming glass, ate and drank like a wolf. The wild clamour outside the house increased every moment. Furious animals—not men and women—seemed to be raging in the courtyard. For an instant he shrank. Remembering la Pénis-sière, he bent his head; raised it again, resolved; struggled on, still against the unending stream of soldiers, until he reached the steps. After sixteen hours of darkness he was half-blind, yet he felt the savage eyes that gleamed all about him. He entertained some confused idea of forming a guard for the duchess.

‘Who is on my side?’ he shouted, catching hold of the rail to steady himself. ‘I am for Madame la duchesse de Berry, mother of Henri Cinq, Regent of France!’

There was a rush towards him.

‘Fools!’ cried a girl in the crowd. ‘Do you not see that he is mad? Look at his face!’

She flung herself between him and the mob.

He made a step forward to protect her, missed his footing, and fell.

‘Hush!’ she whispered, as she helped him to rise. ‘Charles Blum is over there, on the other side of the steps. His back is turned. If you make another sound—— They say the duchess is just coming out. We cannot stir till she has passed. Give me your arm!’

She clung to him that she might keep him by her, but there was no need. The crowd had swallowed them

up in an instant; neither could move, excepting to sway as those around them swayed to and fro. The half-hour that went by was made of other stuff than time. Lucien had recognised the hopelessness of his appeal; there were no friends of the duchess here. His only thought was to wait until she came—to die for her or with her. Meantime the air was good, the sun was good, and Jeanne smiled when he turned to her.

‘You ought not to be among these men,’ he said.
‘You ought to go home.’

‘You might as well say I ought to go to the moon up there,’ she cried, with a joyous laugh.

‘Why did you come?’

‘I knew where you were.’

He wondered a little, and the next moment forgot everything that he might watch.

Word came at last for the soldiers to form a line. At the point of the bayonet they forced the people back on either side. An angry silence followed, uglier than the shouts.

Through the open door Guibourg and de Mesnard could be seen in the hall.

Stylite’s frightened voice reached his ears.

‘Her Royal Highness cannot go on foot, sir; it is not right.’

‘Permit me to differ from you, my dear young lady!’ It was Dermoncourt at his courtliest. ‘Should anyone venture to insult Madame—I do not think it likely—a carriage will not guarantee her from violence. My arm—I answer for it—will be her shield. Trust to me, Your Highness; let us go on foot!’

‘Ah, general!’ cried the voice that Lucien lived only to hear, ‘if you had not fought me *à la* St. Lawrence—

and, let me tell you, that method is not in keeping with the honour of the army—you would not have me on your arm at this moment!’

The gay, fearless laugh rang out once again.

It did but intensify the silence of grinning hate on every face.

Stylite walked first, accompanied by the préfet, Maurice Duval; Guibourg and de Mesnard brought up the rear. Between them went Madame, leaning on Dermoncourt; the National Guard and two regiments of the line formed a double hedge on either side. It was all they could do to resist the multitudes behind, but they stood to their arms. Not a whisper was heard as Madame came down the steps, her cheek flushed, her eyes feverishly bright. Someone had thrown a cloak round her, and she was wearing a large black hat that belonged to mademoiselle du Guiny. She reached the middle of the courtyard in perfect stillness. As the gate was thrown open, a low growl spread from rank to rank behind the soldiers, and someone cursed the duchess.

Dermoncourt stopped, his black eyes flashing fury.

‘Where is the respect due to prisoners—above all, when those prisoners are women?’

The noise ceased.

He walked on at the same pace as before.

Through the gate—over the drawbridge! The great gates of the Castle closed.

She was safe. She was gone for ever.

CHAPTER XXXV

MAISON BOTHEREL

IN what had been once the spacious drawing-room of some great lady of the time of the Pompadour, a numerous company of the most distinguished and the most rebellious sons of the gay city of Paris were assembled. The walls were undergoing decoration at the hands of such a body of house-painters as had never gathered together there before. The tall pier-glasses multiplied the number. There were so many of these that each one had before him, as he worked, the living image of his comrade, crouched like himself on a ladder, a rose behind his ear, a cigarette between his lips, a palette on his wrist. The room resounded with the noise they made, as one after the other trolled out some fragment of a Ballad of Victor Hugo—some snatch of a Song by Alfred de Musset, which was caught up instantly by more or less harmonious brethren, and echoed, corrected, or supplemented, as the case might be. Sometimes a sudden fury of silence fell upon them all, and then the decoration advanced by leaps and bounds. They were all hard at work except a gentle bird-like youth, who flitted hither and thither among them, his feet scarcely touching the ground as he went.

‘People who have not got the needful must have the superfluous,’ he remarked, with a sigh of content, at

the end of one of his infrequent pauses. 'Even poets cannot live on nothing at all.'

'That is very well for you, Gérard de Nerval,' returned another, whose hair was so smooth that it might have been thought he had painted it on to his own head. 'You are not contributing either the needful or the superfluous. You are extraordinarily unproductive, even for a poet.'

He stepped back to survey, in the critically affectionate manner common to artists of all ages, a group of tipsy Bacchanals, their wreaths of ivy slipped among their wild black locks.

'Yes,' he commented, more to himself than to anyone else, 'that thick brute in the corner certainly has a touch of Velasquez!—well, Gérard, what have you to say for yourself?'

'Ungrateful fiend! It was I who invented the ball for the first night of "Le Roi s'Amuse," to begin with. It was I who declared that pictures by the first masters in France would refresh any man who had not the misfortune to be born a *bourgeois*, better than ices from the Palais Royal. It was I who advised you to crown yourselves with flowers like the ancients, instead of sporting round hats and cod-tail coats.'

'Théo would not wear a round hat and a cod-tail coat to save his life—would you, Théo?' inquired a blue-eyed Raphael, who was painting a Naiad in the white absence of costume peculiar to those ladies.

'Yes, I think so,' said the person addressed, finishing with extreme care a dainty bow of mauve ribbon that looped up the petticoat of the mistress of a picnic *à la Watteau* with which he intended to fill the space underneath a great oval mirror. He wore a huge pair of

yellow slippers that hailed from Constantinople, and a thick velvet coat, part of which was hidden by the long dark chestnut hair that fell to his waist.

'I am very much disappointed in you, Théo,' said a gentleman who was busy with a masquerade of Turks at a Carnival; 'I thought you were a man of principle. Is it true that you knocked down a *bourgeois* with your fists on the first night of "Hernani"?' I am almost afraid you did not.'

'It was not the will that was wanting, but the fists,' said Théo. 'I take seven-and-a-quarter in gloves. But if I had done the deed, I should never have dared to boast of it in the room with Léon Gozlan here. In the days when he was a pirate, he killed the captain of his ship because the miserable thing was a *bourgeois*—eh, Léon?'

'Yes,' said a young man like a beautiful Jew, in accents which recalled the sunny shores of his native Marseilles, 'I did kill him. But I ate him afterwards, so that every trace of the crime disappeared.'

'I am prepared to kill and eat a *bourgeois* to-morrow night,' said Théo reflectively. 'Every one of us must be prepared. It is no common occasion. By the way, I have one seat to spare. No, do not all speak at once! It is not a seat for anybody. It happens to be the very best in the Theatre. I have made up my mind that I will give it only to a duke, or to a new poet. If I do not come across one before to-morrow night, the seat will remain vacant. Hulloo, who comes here?'

A tall fellow whose twenty-one summers had tanned his face to Cordova leather, except for the high bright red on the cheek-bones and a certain marked blackness of eyebrow, strode by in the wake of a less remarkable

companion—looked round as a falcon might look at a troop of doves before he pounced—seized a piece of chalk that belonged to the new Velasquez, sketched in three great palm-trees waving over a mosque, and went out silently as he had entered.

All the other pictures on the wall seemed to die away except the delicate work of one dreamy craftsman high up near the ceiling.

‘Excellent!’ said he.

It was the first word he had spoken that day; and he worked away the harder at the gray, tufted trees with which he was planting his landscape. His name was Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot.

‘There’s a dash of the East about that customer,’ said Théo, turning round on the top of his ladder, and taking the cigarette from his mouth. ‘He has a nose like a beak. Cairo gives you a nose like that, it appears, and the sun over there either puts your eyes out or gives you eyes that put out other people’s. The East—the country of the dawn—Bah! I can scarcely wink. Come here, Baby!’ He laid his hand on the shoulder of the handsome boy who had come in with Prosper Marilhaut, and began to declaim:

‘Viens, nous verrons danser les jeunes bayadères
Le soir, lorsque les dromadères
Près des puits du désert s’arrêtent fatigués.’

‘What is that?’ said the boy, his eyes fixed on the white palm-trees and the mosque.

‘A line out of “Les Orientales.”’

‘What is that?’ repeated the boy, as if he were in no way enlightened.

‘The masterpiece of Victor Hugo!’ came in deep

bell-like tones from a mighty man, who, though he was not tall, gave the effect of height because he seemed to recognise a vast space between himself and the floor, now stooping as though to gather up a new idea at his feet, now rising on tip-toe as if to catch it in its flight through the air. He was dressed in the white flannel robe of a Carthusian, out of which his thick white neck rose like a short pillar, crowned with masses of thick black hair. His black eyes pierced the boy like beneficent arrows.

‘It is the masterpiece of Victor Hugo!’ he said again, as if he were in church.

‘Then what is Victor Hugo?’

Théophile Gautier bent his head reverently.

‘A poet—a very great poet—the greatest of all poets.’

‘Have done, Théo!’ cried Gérard de Nerval, flitting noiselessly from the other end of the room. ‘The baby does not know what you mean. He looks like a carp listening to a nightingale. He has not said, “What is a poet?” but he is asking it with his eyes, with his hands, with every bit of him down to his toes. What is a poet?’

A handsome, curly-locked dandy, dressed in a velvet jacket which, by comparison with those of his fellows, looked singularly black, just as his shirt-front, taken in the same connection, looked singularly white, began to answer.

‘A poet is——’

‘No, Gavarni!’ interrupted Célestin Nanteuil, turning round with such haste that he left a blue smear on the arm of his Naiad, ‘it is not your business. You wear English shoes with red heels to them. You can-

not possibly tell what a poet is. Stick to your odious caricatures and let Théo tell him! It is Théo's affair. He is on the look-out for poets.'

Théo settled himself, with deliberation, on one of the lower rungs of his ladder.

'A poet, sir,' said he with great gravity, 'is a sort of evil beast who goes on four paws, waves a dragon's tail over his back, emits fire from his nostrils, hisses like a serpent, and projects a forked dart from between his teeth. From time to time, when the weather is dry, for instance, this horrid beast puts on a human form. It dresses in red, wears a wig of the period of Louis Quatorze, and shoes with painted toes; carries a Toledo blade, and leads the tipsiest life imaginable, consisting of nothing but orgies at which golden bowls are filled to the brim with the foaming wine of Syracuse—at which the ladies dress in gossamer—at which they play the most infernal games, as you may see for yourself in the opera of "Robert le Diable." When those orgies are at an end, the poets go home—not to work (it is certain that they never work and that they have nothing whatever to do with their own verses), but to receive editors, who fall down on their knees to them and offer them piles of gold upon silver salvers. Now you know, sir, what a poet is! Be so kind as to tell your friends and acquaintances, if you happen to have any.'

'I have one who knows better than that,' said the boy. 'He's a poet himself.'

'Is he indeed? What is he like?' inquired a fervent pupil of Ingres, whose 'Diana Bathing' was somewhat strangely surrounded by a tropical forest.

'Very like Théo's description!' said the boy, not

without malice, 'I myself saw an editor on his knees to him.'

'Then,' observed Théo, 'he may be a poet, but he is not an immortal poet. The immortal poet is a different kind. I myself am one.'

'Bravo, "*Albertus*"!' cried the rest. The pupil of Ingres tossed up a little book bound in pink, bearing this title, and caught it again.

'I got it very cheap,' he remarked.

'It will be dear enough by-and-by,' said Théo composedly. 'So will the earlier works of Dom Mar'—he signed to the white flannel Carthusian—'whom I here present to you under the already famous style and title of Monsieur Honoré de Balzac. It will be the same with the earlier works of my illustrious friend, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, up there—and perhaps with those of my illustrious foe, Gavarni, down here. As for that poet of yours, he's no more an immortal poet than you are.'

For all his answer the boy sang, in a clear young voice, the first verse of a Song.

'I have heard that before,' remarked Adolph Leleux, and the Bacchic revel waited while he sang the second verse himself. 'A friend of mine who lives in Lyons sent it me, five or six months ago. All the boys and girls there went wild over it. They thought it was Victor's.'

'It is not Victor's, but it is good,' said Théo decisively. 'Who is this friend of yours, Baby?'

'He is called New Year's Eve.'

'Rubbish! What do you mean?'

'He told me so himself. He said he had no other name. He has come to Paris to look for one.'

'Come to Paris to look for a name—well, many of us have done that!' said Balzac, with interest. 'Paris is a glorious hunting-ground for game of that kind. I go a-hunting to-night—Gozlan with me. Why should he not come, too? He has only to read the signs of the shops; he will find all kinds of names—pompous—ridiculous—odd—paradoxical—enough to rejoice the heart of a writer of vaudevilles—virtuous names—wicked names—fearfully wicked names; these last are usually those of chandlers and confectioners.'

'Yes, but it is not a name for one of his characters that he wants; it is a name for himself. And I do not think he is either a writer of vaudevilles, a chandler, or a confectioner,' said the boy. 'He does not look like that.'

'What does he look like?'

'A duke.'

'Heigho! I was not aware that you consorted with dukes.'

'I have seen the picture of the duc de Berry. I suppose most people have done that.'

The door opened, and Lucien came in on the word. A thrill of surprise ran through the studio.

'Room for His Royal Highness, the poet and the duke!' Théo cried.

Everyone stopped and bowed. The painters in the looking-glass bowed too, the reverse way, and the pupil of Ingres trolled out the third verse of the Song, several of his friends joining in chorus.

Lucien smiled, and bowed slightly in acknowledgment.

'Bravo!' muttered Balzac.

'You perceive that you are not unknown here, sir,'

said Théo. 'Is it true—if I may venture to ask without indiscretion—that you are not sure upon what name you design to confer immortality? His Reverence Dom Mar, is anxious to assist you.'

'My name is Lucien Sylvestre. I am not, sir, a duke. I hope to be more.'

'Be seated, sir!' said de Nerval, pointing magnificently to the rungs of an unoccupied ladder. 'We make you duke of the country of Gallant Bohemia, your title to be subject to confirmation by the Lord of the Land.'

'Ah, Victor Hugo!' said Lucien, with a catch in his breath.

'You desire to pay your respects to him?'

Lucien could not express it in that way.

Théo laughed.

'His Majesty will be charmed. Speechless at the mention of his name! You will probably faint when you behold him. Never mind! I have gone through it all myself. They rather like you to faint. But I do not advise you to seek an audience to-day. He is at the theatre, amusing himself with another monarch. What is the matter, Dom Mar? Are you going to faint, too? I suppose you were not in bed before eight o'clock this morning? It is impossible for me to talk while you stand blinking there like a bat. You can hardly keep your eyes open. Lie down on that sofa and go to sleep, in the name of Dante! He never thought it waste of time to shut his eyes; he made something out of his dreams.'

Balzac fell rather than sank upon the couch that Leleux wheeled back for him. The piercing black eyes closed. He was asleep in an instant.

‘Now for business!’ Théo went on, turning to Lucien. ‘May I ask you to accept this ticket for to-morrow night? It is the first night of a play of which you may have heard, “Le Roi s’Amuse.”’

‘I have heard of it,’ said Lucien.

Once again his friend’s voice sounded in his ear on that last night at the *château* de la Pénissière.

Aloud he only said:

‘Thank-you.’

‘You look almost as young as my esteemed friend, the baby,’ Théo said, with a curious glance at him.

‘Have you ever gone to the theatre before?’

‘No.’

‘Why not?’

‘I never had money enough.’

That is no reason at all. We none of us have money enough, but we go every night of our lives. Think again.’

‘I suppose it never occurred to me. When there was a Moon I could see her out of my room at Lyons.’

‘Ah, now we get to the root of the matter! Perhaps you had better not go to-morrow. You will be disappointed.’

‘Disappointed in “Le Roi s’Amuse!”’ cried the pupil of Ingres, as who should say, ‘Disappointed in Heaven!’

‘The gods themselves cannot recall their gifts, sir,’ said Lucien, making no motion to give back his ticket.

‘Disappointed? What do you mean, Théo?’

‘What I say. You have no idea of the expectations of ignorance; and the expectations of an ignorant poet are the worst of all. They are in the habit of attending theatres of their own. I have one myself. It is called

the *Théâtre Théophile Gautier*—a very odd institution—very superior to the Français.’

‘What is it like, Théo?’

Gautier threw himself back in an armchair, and put both hands over his eyes, as if he were gazing far away into the distance.

‘Oh, there are glow-worms instead of footlights, and a beetle stands at the conductor’s desk, and beats time with his *antennæ*! The cricket has his place in the orchestra; the nightingale plays first flute; tiny fairies that live in the flowers of the sweet-pea hold double basses of lemon-peel between their pretty little legs, more white than ivory, and fiddle away as hard as they can go with bows made of Titania’s eyebrow stretched on a spider’s web.’

‘Not bad!’ said Gavarni, proceeding to draw the conductor. ‘What is the curtain like?’

‘It is woven of butterfly-wings, thinner than the skin of an eggshell. Three taps, and then it rises slowly, as every well-behaved curtain should.’

‘The audience?’ Gérard de Nerval asked.

‘Mushrooms who keep their hats on—insolent beggars—violets on tiptoe between the blades of grass, their blue eyes wide open to see the hero go by—souls of poets in mother-of-pearl stalls, looking on at the play through dewdrops mounted on the gold pistil of a lily—their opera-glasses, of course.’

‘And the scenery? You must not leave that out,’ murmured Corot. ‘For my part, I never see anything else at a play.’

‘It is not like any scene that ever was mounted before. The country it represents is more unknown than America before its discovery. Even your palette does

not show half the colours that prevail there. They are rather odd, perhaps—no end of emerald green, Antwerp blue, ultramarine, crimson and yellow lake. The sky is greenish-blue, striped with broad bands of pale yellow and fawn; in the middle distance little delicate slender trees, the light visible through their thin, dead-rose coloured foliage; and far away, instead of drowning in blue mist, they are of the loveliest apple-green, spirals of golden smoke rising among them here and there.’

‘No, Théo. I do not like your apple-green distance,’ Corot said. ‘You must mend that, or I will not come to your theatre.’

Théo, who was launched on the full tide of his eloquence, went on, heedless of interruption.

‘Stray beams of light—ruined temples—towers—towns full of belfries, pyramids, domes, arcades, balconies, reflected from the hillsides where they cling in lakes of crystal—great, broad-leaved chestnuts with clouds heaped on their heads like snowballs—their twisted roots grip the soil like the fingers of a giant, and the eyes of dwarfs gleam from among their branches. The woodpecker keeps time on them with his horny beak, and emerald lizards bask in the sunshine on the moss at their feet, while the bullfinch and the linnet bend from the boughs to prompt the actors in the play.’

‘A different kind of play from Hugo’s!’

‘Very different! The characters do not belong to any particular country, nor to any particular time. They come and go, no one knows how nor why; they do not eat and drink; they live nowhere, and they have no profession; they own no property; they draw no

income. Only sometimes they carry under their arms a little casket full of diamonds as big as a pigeon's egg. Not a drop of rain falls from the petal of a flower as they pass—they do not stir an atom of dust along the road. They dress in the most extravagant, fantastic way in the world. They wear steeple hats with brims the size of a Chinese parasol, and tall feathers, torn from the bird of Paradise and the phoenix. Their cloaks are striped with bright colour; their doublets of velvet and brocade slashed with satin or cloth of silver, and trimmed with gold lace; their breeches are puffed out like balloons; their stockings are embroidered in scarlet; their high-heeled shoes are decorated with huge rosettes; they carry little slender swords, the point up and the handle down, all over odds and ends of lace and ribbon.'

'Are there no women in the play?' asked the pupil of Ingres, who was listening intently.

'Yes, a great many—the women of Della Bella and De Hooghe. Their dresses are full and billowy, with wonderful folds of shifting rainbow colour like the breast of doves, great sleeves with other sleeves coming out of them, ruffs of open lace rising higher than the head so as to frame it, bodices charged with bows and sparkling embroidery, aigrettes of the heron's plume, necklaces of big pearls, peacock-feather fans with mirrors in the centre, little slippers, and pattens.'

'Can they speak, or are they marionettes?' inquired Célestin.

'Oh no! they talk in sweet, low voices, without any hurry, like well-bred people who attach no great importance to what they do.'

'Where is the motive of the play?'

‘There is none. Effects have no causes, and causes no effects. The aristocratic father arrives post haste from China in a bamboo junk, on purpose to recognise the little girl who has been carried off. The action plunges into the Ocean under the topaz dome of the waves, and walks about at the bottom of the sea through forests of coral and madripore, or flies up to the sky on the wings of the lark and the griffin.’

‘And what language do they talk in those parts?’

‘The dialogue is very universal. Sometimes the lion says “*Oh!*” Sometimes a wall talks through the chinks.’

‘Very charming, but not much like life, as the butterfly said to the snail.’

‘On the contrary all this pell-mell disorder is much more like real life in the end than the most minute study of manners. Every man includes in himself all humanity, and if he only writes what comes into his head, he succeeds better than if he copies objects outside himself with the help of a microscope.’

‘I always thought he would,’ said Lucien, musing.

‘If you mean to discuss instead of to describe, I am off!’ cried Gérard de Nerval. ‘I have found a rose with the heart of a lily. I am going to look at it. Fare you well, poets all!’

And he fluttered out of the door, followed by a joyful chorus of brethren in search of their dinner.

‘Yes, go!’ said Lucien to Prévost de Saint-Marc, his young admirer; and the boy followed the rest.

Dom Mar, Théophile Gautier and Lucien were left alone. There was silence for a minute or two, counted by the soft, regular breathing of the sleeper.

‘You wish to ask me something?’ Théo said, fixing

his brilliant eyes on Lucien. 'Do I, by some happy chance, know the address of the lady of your affections? Can I be of use to you in any affair of literature or of love? I like your look. I am your most obedient humble servant. I will even read one of the half-dozen plays in manuscript, which are no doubt lying in your drawer at this moment—mind—I say *one!*'

'I will not put your friendship to so severe a test, sir,' said Lucien, laughing shyly; 'but——'

'Well, go on. I am weary of *But*. There is no word in the world that is used so often.'

'Can you tell me where I may find madame de Feuchères? Can you tell me who she is?'

For once Théo forgot himself. He whistled—and his whistle awoke Dom Mar.

'Traitor! thief! assassin!' he cried, starting up furiously. 'You have lost me ten thousand francs. If I had kept awake, I should have followed out the thread of a story that would have brought me at least that sum, without the later editions. You have made me miss interviews with bankers—editors—duchesses—I shall be too late to take up a note. That fatal sleep may cost me millions.'

'Hush, Dom Mar,' said Théo in a whisper. 'There are things more important than money. This young man wishes to know who madame de Feuchères is.'

Dom Mar fell instantly into a silence which was even more full of astonishment than Théo's whistle.

'Well, who is she, Théo?' he said at last. 'You are fond of definitions. Define this lady.'

'She is, or she appears to be, the eternal Helen, the everlasting other man's wife, the thing behind the bars

that everybody desires and no one gets. I am not sure that everybody desires her quite so much since the month of September, 1829, though, eh?’

‘What have you to do with her, young man?’ asked Balzac abruptly.

‘I do not know who I am,’ said Lucien. ‘My friend, the marquis de Civrac, does not know. He thinks that madame de Feuchères does.’

‘It is certain that she knows many strange things,’ Balzac said, in slow, reflective tones. ‘De Civrac told you to seek her out? I remember him of old. An out-and-out classic, but a fine fellow for all that. Not a touch of the *bourgeois* about him. Curious advice, though, to give a young man! Most people think she murdered the late Duke of Condé in the month of September, 1829.’

‘No, no, Dom Mar!’ said Théo, ‘that is not proven. Alexandre Dumas had it from the doctor, that it was *bonâ-fide* suicide on the part of the old duke.’

‘*Ca n’empêche pas*. She had made his life intolerable for some time beforehand.’

‘You do not credit the rumour that she wanted to insist on his marrying her?’

‘No, there is something more in it; and what that something may be, Louis-Philippe is afraid to inquire. Bah! the age is degenerate! Grave suspicions of foul play—and the last of the Condés! It would have been an affair of the scaffold in any age but this.’

‘The little duchess is mad; but she did well to reject that legacy for her son. If Louis-Philippe had kept his hands equally clean——’

‘He would have been in gaol, and Henri Cinq on

the throne this day, my friend. Madame de Feuchères has made and unmade Kings before now.'

'How is this fellow here to get sight of her?' said Théo.

'I do not know; I have no power.'

'Nonsense! You are acquainted with every suspicious character in Paris. Look at his face! You can see at a glance what may depend on it.'

'I saw that when he came into the room. But she is not easy to see.'

'You are talking for talking's sake. You have arranged more difficult affairs than that.'

Balzac reflected. At last he turned kindly to Lucien.

'Trust me a little further. Tell me what you know of yourself. At present I have nothing with which to persuade her. If I had your story, I could repeat it. I can tell a story—sometimes—in a way that makes people listen.'

Once more Lucien told of the stormy night at the mill, of the strangers and the strange words, of the key and the snuff-box. He was growing very tired of it.

'Thank-you!' said Balzac, when he had finished. 'I can make her listen to that. I could have done with less. What a fortune for a young man to enter on life with such a story! No woman could resist it. You go to the play to-morrow night, of course? You mean to dance at the ball here afterwards? No? Well, then, come to my house, rue Cassini, near the Observatory, half an hour after midnight. Forgive me for recommending you to take precautions. I am a marked man; I cannot come and go like others.

Kindly ring the bell seven times, and when the porter appears, say to him, "Caviare is in season now." Directly after, you will meet my valet on the stairs. Say to him, "I have a snuff-box for the lady." There will be a maid on the first landing, and you will just let fall the words, "Monsieur de Civrac is quite well." I hope he *is* quite well, by the way? We thought he was killed at la Pénissière.'

'He is quite well, thank-you.'

'I am delighted to hear it! I met a friend of his three days ago, who told me for certain that he was dead. Now let us talk of real things! What do you think of my "Firmiani," Théo?'

CHAPTER XXXVI

'LE ROI S'AMUSE'

'WHAT are they hissing now?'

'Paul Veronese. The costume was designed from the double-bass in "The Marriage of Cana."'

'Kings must not appear in dressing-gowns—do you see? Louis-Philippe never does.'

'Hang Louis-Philippe!'

'With all my heart; but he was nearly shot to-night.'

'The devil! I got in late. Was that the reason of the icy stillness after the first Act?'

'It was. Not good taste to feel much interested when the King had escaped with his life, you know! Besides, they hated our singing the Marseillaise. Prévost de Saint-Marc refused to sing, by the way. I believe the boy is a Legitimist in the depths of his heart. Théo stopped it after the second Act. Too late. The wretched players had lost their heads! They behaved like idiots! I would have hissed myself, if it had not been for Hugo. I say, wake up, young man! I have never heard you applaud once. You seem to me to be sound asleep. I was told you were a duke and a poet. You have all your trade to learn as a *claqueur*. Remember, you never paid for your ticket.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Lucien hurriedly.

He was longing for Théo's audience of mushrooms, violets, and souls of poets. The audience at the

Théâtre Français appeared to him to be composed entirely of snakes. When the curtain drew up, however, he sat enthralled, entranced. He saw nothing, heard nothing, thought of nothing except Victor Hugo. When it was down he saw René’s face, heard René saying, ‘*The night his new play comes out, when all the flatterers have done——*’

‘Shall you go home with Hugo to-night?’

‘No.’

‘And you?’

‘No.’

‘And you?’

Célestin Nauteuil shook his head.

‘And you?’

‘No,’ said Théophile Gautier. ‘He is best alone to-night. He will have to tell dear little madame Hugo, who is sitting up for him.’

‘Poor fellow!’

‘Never let me hear you say that again!’ Lucien remarked, with such majesty that Adolphe Leleux cowered away from him, taken aback by astonishment. Was this the meek person who had been sitting hitherto as if he were deaf? Leleux began to think that he might be a duke after all.

The noise and clamour on both sides reached Lucien as mere foolishness. Up to this moment he had not heeded it. Why, because the divine beauty of certain lines filled his eyes with tears, was he to strike his hands together to make a silly, senseless, discordant din? As for stamping with his feet, he abhorred both the exertion and the result of the exertion. He never carried an umbrella. Unless he could not help shouting, he objected to shout.

Now, however, it was brought home to him that he had not been doing his duty. In the depth of his heart he wondered at the conduct of his hundred-and-forty-nine companions, especially at that of Théo; but he followed suit with greater zest because he had caught sight of monsieur Berryer in a box, and monsieur Berryer did not applaud. The curtain fell for the last time.

‘Shall I name you?’ said Triboulet, the Fool, from the side-scenes; and they knew that he spoke to the author.

‘Sir, I believe in my piece rather more since it has failed.’

Lucien recognised the figure of the man who had defended Corneille against Victor Hugo in the office of the editor of the *Glaneuse* at Lyons. He sprang to his feet, gave one last cheer, discovered that he was inaudible from hoarseness, and fled.

Outside the theatre he hailed a cab.

‘Can you drive fast?’

‘As fast as the devil himself, young gentleman!’

‘Then drive like the devil to No. 6, Place Royale, the house at the corner of the square. The devil take you if you are not there in five minutes!’

The streets were empty. The hissing rain without stung like the hissing snakes within. Snakes! snakes! The world was full of snakes! Was this what it meant to be the greatest poet on earth? To be forsaken alike of friends and foes! At least there should be one to meet—to greet him. At least he should hear the voice of the worshipper who had died thinking to the last of his glory. The dead should make amends.

‘Wait!’ he called to the driver as he jumped out.

By the look of the house he knew that he was in time, that the master had not come home.

'No,' he said to the sleepy servant, 'I do not wish to see madame. Do not announce me. Monsieur knows that I am coming on business. I will await him here.'

He saw a woman's figure on the stairs, pushed open the nearest door, and went in at a venture.

Clearly he had not been seen.

'I thought it must be Victor. Will he never come?' said the wife plaintively.

She listened a moment, and retreated upstairs again.

Lucien found himself in a small, round sitting-room, dimly lit by a shaded lamp and the last embers of a dying fire. On the table, under the lamp, a large manuscript volume lay open at the last page, as if someone had just finished reading. The last lines were adorned with a pen-and-ink sketch of a man in motley, his elbow on his knee, his head on his hand, and underneath it the words, *The last Fool thinking of the last King*.

A minute later he heard the key turn in the lock of the door outside, and flying feet on the stair.

'Well?'

Apparently the husband's face told what had happened.

There was a long, quivering sigh; that was all.

The soft skirts rustled up again.

'Put out the light before you come!' she called over the banisters.

'I will put out the light.'

Lucien shrank back as Victor Hugo entered; but he was not noticed. The words that he had meant to speak turned to breath on his lips. He felt that he saw Hell.

The poet sat down on a couch in the attitude of his own hero, rested his head upon his hand—thought. The face was gray with thought.

He rose, turned down the lamp, looked round as if to see whether there were anything else he could extinguish—beheld the last spark of the fire glimmering still on the hearth—fetched a jug of water from a recess, flung it on to the ashes, and went out.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MADAME DE FEUCHÈRES

‘MONSIEUR BALZAC has wonderful invention; he can even invent sometimes what is true,’ said madame de Feuchères.

Lucien made no reply.

The strange eyes of this woman mesmerized him. They were deep with the experience of long life, yet there was not a line in the forehead above them. He only knew for certain that she was not young and not old. Her voice had the same agelessness. Instinctively he feared her at once.

‘She could make me believe anything she liked. If she tells me that she is good, I shall believe her.’

But madame de Feuchères did not tell him that she was good.

‘Monsieur Balzac told me that I once cared for de Civrac. It was an invention, of course.’ Her smile had more than sweetness in it. ‘Monsieur le marquis is always monsieur le marquis?’

‘Always, Madame.’

‘You are his son?’

‘No.’

‘I knew you were not his own son,’ she said with a dark gleam of amusement. ‘I knew that directly I saw you. You are your mother’s—and your father’s. Most people see the father in you; I see the mother, as he does. He has made you his heir, has he not?’

‘Yes.’

‘That he should endow with all his worldly goods the child of the duc de Berry! Ah, in the old days, how he would have hated him—as I hated your mother!’ She spoke without the least emotion, but passed her hand over her forehead as if to recall what she had once felt. ‘Sit down!’ she said; ‘I will tell you about yourself. I sent for you for two reasons. I wished to see whether you were indeed so like your father as de Balzac insisted that you were. If he spoke the truth, I thought it might be of some assistance to the duchess of Berry. I have a liking for her; I cannot tell why. She is a perfect fool. Oh, do not look so angry! Only children—and fools—grow angry.’

‘I am a fool, then,’ said Lucien.

She shook her head.

‘No; you come of too good parentage. The duc de Berry married your mother in secret five years before his wedding with the present duchess. It was a legal marriage, but I alone had the certificate. I threatened to destroy it, and to expose her, if she did not conceal the birth of a child from everyone—even from her husband, who was in exile at the time. Her brother, with whom she lived, found out. He did not believe in the marriage, and I held my tongue. He took his sister away with him; he insisted that the child must — disappear. In common with him, I thought that she herself had drowned her infant. She would not go, she said, unless she were allowed to do this. Even then she outwitted us. A child, unlawfully born, had died in a cottage near the inn where they were staying. She buried that child in the river. She had you carried off to a distant village, and left in

charge of a woman there. Her brother never knew, and for years I remained in ignorance.'

She paused.

The odd, museum-like room, in which pictures, statuettes, bric-à-brac of every description, relics of every kind, were jumbled up together, filled with the recollected presence of those long dead.

'In three months I had told her I should return. I was not in France at the time. I vowed that I would find out whether she had obeyed me. She was to leave a token at the windmill by which I might feel sure. The key was the key of the casket which held the certificate. It was not in the lock when I happened to find the thing. The snuff-box had belonged to the duc de Berry. She dropped it on the road by accident, and it was picked up by a beggar, who sold it to the owner of a curiosity-shop in the nearest town. I dare say you may remember the place, for it was close to the College of the Oratorians, where, it seems, you were educated. There the marquis de Civrac found and bought it. He collects snuff-boxes, as he collects everything else. Monsieur de Balzac's collections are not so choice, although they are larger. Monsieur de Civrac did not know whose hands had held that snuff-box.'

Again the ageless eyes looked at some face that Lucien could not see.

'He did not know who her husband was, nor that a child of hers lived. I had sent her brother a message by her, "*Quand tu le voudras*," which meant that I was not afraid (he had a secret of mine, as I had one of his)—that I would betray him without remorse unless I was convinced that they had done as I desired.

I added that, if anything prevented my return, I should send the Prince of Condé in a year and a month. I had my reasons for fixing that date, but you are not concerned with those. Well, it is not what we hope that comes to pass, and it is not what we fear; it is something we never thought of! On that night your mother caught a chill, from the effects of which she never recovered. Three months later I heard that she could not live; and—at her urgent request, that she might set her brother's mind at rest before she died—I sent her back the certificate, on condition that he should pay me, within two years, a sum of money of which I stood in need at the time. There had been passages of love between us, which made it easier.'

Lucien shuddered to hear that word on her lips.

'The duc de Berry returned from England soon afterwards, to find that his wife was dead. He knew nothing about the child; and there was then no motive for declaring a marriage which would have embroiled him with all his relations. Ten months later your uncle was killed accidentally. I profited by the accident—that was all. I have profited by accidents throughout life.'

'Is there anything in life by which she has not profited?' thought Lucien, as the exquisite lines of her mouth softened into the glimmer of a smile. 'You never came to the mill?' he said.

'There was no need. I had all that I wanted. Everyone else concerned was dead, so far as I knew, except the duke. That man at the mill would have wanted payment; they always do. Some women would have forgotten the whole affair. I am not like others, unluckily. I have a conscience.'

The smile deepened.

'Here it comes,' thought Lucien. 'She is going to say she is good.'

'I regretted that the duc de Berry had not been quite fairly treated. So long as he had no son, I felt anxious. When he married the present duchess, I thought I should be able to forget. Her first child was a girl. The second was a boy—it only lived two hours. She must be a fool! Why could she not arrange it better than that? Then came the assassination of the duke at the Opera-house—the birth of the Child of the Miracle. I offered her the Condé fortune—all that would have come to the duc d'Enghien, had he lived. She was proud; she suspected my motives, and she refused. Can you not see that she was a fool? The Citizen-King is not so scrupulous. Even then I would have saved her for her child's sake. I knew of the plot at Nantes. Did she receive a warning letter signed "*Jauge*"?''

'She did. It came too late. She stood committed beyond retrieval.'

'Ah! it came too late,' said madame de Feuchères indifferently. 'She is a very good woman, but not clever. If you have brains, you can strike a bargain with the Minister now on her behalf. You must not mention my name, of course—but you may mention me. Thiers will not spread the news abroad. As regards other people, I do not ask you for a promise. You have your mother's eyes. You are too like her to speak when you should not.'

'Tell me——' said Lucien.

He looked at her with resolute entreaty, as if he, too, must be able to see that other woman whom

madame de Feuchères saw—his mother—present before them in the room.

‘By what you are yourself, you know who she was.’

‘Alas, Madame,’ said Lucien, ‘what am I?’

‘A King of Hearts,’ said she.

The gracious gesture of her hand was a dismissal.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BLUM LOSES HIS SITUATION

‘WELL,’ said the marquis, ‘who are you? The eldest son of the duc de Berry?’

‘Yes,’ Lucien said thoughtfully. ‘I intend to make good my claim—to Thiers,’ he added.

‘I thought you despised Kings—that you had no ambition except to be a poet.’

‘It is true.’

‘I see. You urge your claim. If he consents to release Madame, you desist?’

‘I promised her that my claim, if claim there were, should never be enforced. But I think she would forgive this, as things are.’

‘She has nothing to forgive you. She has forsaken her own cause.’

‘I know,’ said Lucien. ‘But I must not forsake it.’

‘I only knew because of a certain free-masonry that exists between those who have had a like experience,’ said the marquis. ‘But you——?’

‘Sir, you have the right to ask any other question you like of me.’

‘Does anyone else know?’

‘Not a soul.’

‘You had not heard of this when we were at la Pénissière?’

‘No.’

‘She must have been very imprudent.’

Lucien was silent.

'I should do as you do,' said the marquis at last. 'After all, what is the use of life except to live? How do you propose to set about it? How will you get at Thiers?'

'I must find my friend, Charles Blum. He is hand-and-glove with the Minister.'

'Do not see him at his own house! Meet him somewhere. You will have to exact a promise that your liberty is not interfered with. Remember that you have compromised yourself. You are no more safe than I am. If Thiers refuses to have any dealings with you——?'

'I must save her some other way.'

'It is just possible that Thiers may welcome your interference. She exasperated him; but it was a false move to take her prisoner. What are they going to do with her? We are not in the Middle Ages.'

'She cannot remain in their hands; she must escape. I will find Blum at once.'

'You have not far to look. There he goes! Stay, do not attract attention! Walk along on the other side of the street until he sees you.'

Lucien followed the advice, but Blum seemed to be afflicted with blindness. He plodded past, his eyes on the pavement, and never raised them once.

'Blum!'

Apparently the person addressed was deaf as well as blind. He made no sign whatever.

They were by this time at some distance from the Three Elephants. Lucien crossed over, and, laughing, took him by the shoulder.

'What a fool you must be, Lucien!' cried his friend

angrily. 'It was bad enough at Nantes, where you were always running under my nose. Do you want to compel me to give you up to the police?'

'I want to see Thiers. I *will* see him, too, and at once. You must take me to him.'

In his short passage up the street, Lucien had contrived to forget every word of de Civrac's warning.

Finally, Blum consented. When Lucien had a thing at heart, he was, to certain natures, irresistible; and Blum was one of these.

The Minister of the Interior was at home.

'Our friend, the poet? Oh yes, I shall be charmed to see him! The interview must be private, you say? Ah, well, Joly and two of his men are in the next room waiting to speak with me; but there is a curtain between—they will hear nothing. You can wait in the study.'

Blum waited twenty minutes, after which the Minister came out alone.

'You will not see your friend again just at present,' he remarked.

Something in his unusually suave tones alarmed Blum.

'What has happened, sir?'

'I think he is not quite sane,' said Thiers. 'We shall try the effect of a little restraint. In the present excited state of the country, it is not safe for lunatics to be at large. A great English thinker suggested once that a nation, like an individual, might go mad. The possibility of it has been proved over and over again in France. It was proved the other day in the case of the duchess. The *Jeunes-France*—who are the maddest of the many madmen about—saluted

this young fellow as a Duke at the Maison Botherel. We have Dukes enough, as it is. Besides, I find that he all but set Lyons on fire six months ago. I underrated the power of a Song, it seems. I cannot give him the chance again.'

'Sir,' said Blum earnestly, 'you promised that no harm should come to him.'

'Exactly. I am keeping him out of harm's way. I can give you no further information about him now. Good-night, my dear Blum.'

'I must know where my friend is, sir.'

Blum's temper was rising.

'He is quite safe.'

'If you can tell me nothing further, sir, I must leave your service.'

'As you will!' said Thiers indifferently. 'I dare say you are right in your decision. There are forty other applicants for the post.'

CHAPTER XXXIX

JEANNE CONSENTS

ONCE more, upon a quiet moonlit night in cold and early Spring, Lucien walked up the avenue of poplar trees at Morfontaine.

He moved gravely, slowly, as if he suspected a foe behind each thin rounded stem. The eyes that had been wont to gaze up and away were now alert as those of a fox; and he was listening not with his ears only, but with his eyes. He took minute care not to make the least noise as he went. Yet within he was shouting and singing. The eighteen months that had passed since Thiers arrested and threw him into prison had given him an outward cautiousness of manner that might last a week, perhaps; they had not broken that independent spirit.

‘If they were all dead,’ he cried to himself, ‘Madame—the marquis—Jeanne—that blessed dear old fool, Charles Blum—still I am free!’

A sudden chill of horror froze his soul in the midst of his exultation.

‘All these are older than I am—excepting Jeanne. It will be true one day.’

He glanced at the moon.

‘Not a minute older.’

And, ‘Not so old as you were this time two years ago!’ he cried to the backward buds of the poplar-trees.

The moon rode on, remote and peaceful; the boughs waved softly in the wind.

‘Excepting Jeanne!’ Lucien said to himself again.

‘The marquis is well, sir,’ said the old butler, ‘but he is away from home. You are expected, sir. Your room is ready. The fire is lighted there. It has been lit every night since the marquis returned home in November.’

‘Where is he?’

‘He has gone to Lyons. He has been much away from home of late. He begged that you would not attempt to follow him, sir—that you would wait for him here. There is a document in the deal box in his room; he said you would know what to do with it.’

‘I come from a long way off,’ said Lucien, with hesitation. (It was true morally—not literally.) ‘Can you give me any news of Her Royal Highness, Madame la duchesse de Berry?’

He looked up at the moon as he spoke.

‘No one about here speaks of her now, sir; she is quite forgotten.’

‘Not dead?’ said Lucien violently.

‘Dear no, sir! Her Royal Highness is not of the stuff to die. Everyone believed, though, that she would die in prison, before the child was born.’

‘The *child*?’

For a moment even the old butler, for whom life could hold very few surprises, looked startled. Had Monsieur Sylvestre come from the grave that he had never heard of this? But surprise was not allowed to get the better of courtesy in the house of the marquis.

‘No doubt, sir, you have heard of the secret marriage of the duchess? All the world knows it now.

She joined the Count Lucchesi-Palli in Sicily last summer, I believe.'

She was free then.

His long imprisonment counted for nothing.

But she was free.

When the old man left him, Lucien hurried upstairs, fitted the key into the lock, and, opening the box, drew out the bit of parchment it contained, the certificate of his mother's marriage. He gazed at it with an utter absence of emotion, tore it in two, burnt it. Long he sat thinking of that other kingdom where succession is not by inheritance.

After supper, alone by the charred fragments, he let his thoughts return to the duchess. There was no shade of bitterness in them. She, too, had entered on a kingdom—on a kingdom to which all men and women alike were born. She had forgotten. Well, what then? She was forgotten too. He saw the little light figure, the child in her arms. To the child he could give her up. He wandered out again into the garden, and stood beneath the tree, as he had stood when the white hand stole from the window. She seemed to stand there now again, to wave farewell to him.

With the dawn of day he was up and on his way to Lyons.

As he drew near the town, he felt surprised that he should be the only passenger in the *diligence* while every *diligence* that passed him on the road was crowded. The driver was reticent, the guard declared that he could give no information; but some miles short of the town they stopped, the former declaring that he would not go further.

'If you take my advice, you will stop where we do,' said the guard.

Lucien shook his head.

'I have friends in the town.'

He walked on.

Hurrying towards him, with white scared face, he perceived the boyish friend, Prévost de Saint-Marc, whom he had seen last among the painters and poets in the drawing-room of the Maison Botherel.

'Tell me what has happened?' he cried.

'You!' cried the boy. 'You!'

Lucien thrust his arm through Saint-Marc's and compelled him to walk in the direction in which he was going.

'You must tell me. I have no time to lose. I will let you go when you have done.'

The boy looked up with frightened eyes.

'Lyons is full of you; it is you they want! We thought you had been killed,' said he.

'Well, now you know I am alive! I have been little better than dead, though, for a year and a half. You yourself look like a ghost, and so does everyone else along the road, for the matter of that. What is the matter with Lyons?'

'Your Song is the matter. Look there, that is not the smoke of the factories.'

'I see tongues of flame. Has there been a great fire?'

'Where do you come from?' said the boy.

'From prison.'

'You have heard nothing?'

'Nothing! Tell me! be quick!'

'Twenty thousand looms ceased to work about a month ago. That is all.'

‘Why?’

‘Scarcity of foreign orders. Scarcity of home orders. Reduction of twenty-five *centimes* in the price of plush. And your Song.’

‘Twenty-five *centimes*—that meant starvation.’

‘When they did not cry they sang—they went about in bands, singing that Song.’

Lucien caught his breath painfully.

‘Go on!’

‘Half the masters shut up their houses and fled. The rest were determined on war. They have provoked the men in every way. Blum, of the *Glaneuse*, did all he could to stir them up. He never let them forget that Song.’

‘He never does let people forget.’

‘At one moment we thought peace was coming. They had called in the marquis de Civrac to arbitrate. He almost persuaded them to be reconciled. Armand Carrel and Cavaignac were turned back, just as they were leaving Paris, by the news that the looms were at work again.’

‘What stopped them?’

‘The arrest of Blum and five others, after the strike was over. He escaped, but the people were roused to fury. There was not a chance after that. Besides, the spies of Government went everywhere, egging the men on. They wanted to strike a good blow and have done with it. They were afraid of the sympathy of the troops; they ordered the colours to be carried, so that every deserter might be shot instantly.’

‘Blum escaped, you say?’

‘Yes. He has been busy enough since. The day before yesterday the Lieutenant-General encamped on

the Place Bellecour, Fleury up at La Croix Rousse, Buchet outside the Archbishop's palace, Dietmann at the Hôtel-de-Ville. The 7th of the Line guards the Place St. Jean.'

'They have not hurt the Cathedral?'

'Not yet. It is full of troops — you can see the points of bayonets between the mouldings.'

'When did all this begin?'

'The night before last. I could not sleep. I wandered about the streets. Terror everywhere! Now a wild, helpless crowd, now utter desolation. One moment I could scarcely keep my footing for the rush—the next I was in a desert. Yesterday was better.'

'Yesterday?'

'The tocsin rang out from the Church of the Cordeliers—from St. Nizier. The black flag floated on the tower of St. Polycarp and over the Asylum. Some boys tried to construct a barricade—mere children. I was in the crowd, looking on. I burned to help, but the people were all silent. At last a man stepped forward—joined the boys. Instantly one of the *gendarmes* stabbed him. He reckoned without his host. Under the clothes they found the belt of an agent of the police. He had been urging us on, so that the soldiers might have an excuse to fire. After that it was civil war. I heard the first cannon on the Place Louis-le-Grand. The shipping down at the quays burst into flame—look!—down there! You can see the smoke. A boat loaded with hay went down the river all alight. Pont Chazourne caught as it went underneath, and three of the arches were burnt—there! do you see? The great Squares were on fire. We had no arms. Most of our chiefs had fled. Blum

was glorious. He went everywhere, singing your Song, and wherever we sang it we conquered. But we had not leaders enough.'

'Where was de Civrac?'

'I do not know. They say he joined the enemy.'

'That he did not.'

'He held out for peace till there was no hope any longer. Then he was for crushing the insurrection at once by force of arms. It could have been done, Sylvestre; it would have been more merciful in the end, but they would not listen to him. They wanted rebellion so that they might revenge themselves.'

'You will never win if you have de Civrac against you,' said Lucien slowly. 'Why did you run away?'

'To find you.'

'What do you mean?'

'It was your Song that made us win. If I could but find you, I knew you would lead.'

'I will,' said Lucien. 'Where can I meet Blum?'

'He lives still in the old house. It has not been hurt. They are strong yet in the quarter of the Cordeliers.'

Lucien took the boy's hand.

'Farewell!' he said, and went.

Along the desolate, deserted quays he walked—through the long streets of burnt and desecrated houses, room after room where quiet mysteries of birth and death had passed lying now pitifully naked to the cold light. Those houses that still stood were locked and barred, and not a face showed at any window. For the moment there was a lull. The soldiers were on guard. The barricades were manned by silent, eager combatants, but they had not yet been

attacked. The rebels had found two pieces of cannon at St. Irénée and dragged them up to the heights of Fourvières, whence they were shelling the Place Bellecour with bits of iron and powder dried in the sun.

Around the Church of the Cordeliers, however, all was different.

As Lucien turned the corner of the street in which he had lived with Blum and Mademoiselle Jeanne, he felt amazed to see a familiar figure by the Fountain where once he stood to sing his Song. It was Blum, haranguing a vast and restless crowd, his face resolute as ever, but thin and worn, his eyes full of fire.

‘Here where I now stand!’ he cried, ‘there stood among you, just two years ago, a poet—one who would have made Lyons famous. Where is he at this moment? Who knows? He is dead, perhaps, the victim of political intrigue, the martyr of the people. You who have his words by heart, you to whom liberty to sing the song of freedom is dear as life, say, will you not deliver or avenge him? All those who agree with me follow me to the Church of the Cordeliers! We are still strong there. All those who agree with me hold up their hands and shout “To-morrow!”’

The shout that arose far and near deafened Lucien; he put his hands to his ears. A man behind pulled them down roughly.

‘You never shouted!’ he exclaimed. ‘Cry “To-morrow,” or I denounce you as a spy of the Government.’

‘To-morrow!’ Lucien shouted.

‘Police! police!’

The warning notes rang from a window close at

hand. The old cry cleared the street just as it had done two years ago. Blum vanished in the swarm of his adherents, and Lucien pursued his way alone to the house.

He stole up quietly, opened the door without noise. In the well-remembered room everything was the same. It was as he had often pictured it in the days of his captivity, bright with the cheerful light of the sun, the first glimmer of gold showing among the green spiky cages of the crocus leaves at the window. Only one thing was changed — the only thing he looked for. Jeanne sat there not at work, but with a child on her knee.

A jealous pang shot through him. She was counting its fingers, and every time she counted them she kissed them, while the baby laughed.

‘Jeanne!’ said he angrily.

She sat the child down on the floor. She rose, and she fell back again, and no word came to help her. Such a wild light of love leapt to her blue eyes that Lucien trembled as at a vision.

She never heard the child, though it was crying.

‘Not her baby!’ thought Lucien, and bent down to soothe it.

Suddenly she became aware, stooped, caught it to her breast.

‘Ah! if she held a child of mine——’

His own thought seized him, turned him to stone.

She quieted the frightened baby and took it out. He watched her go across the street. He watched her swift return. She went and came in a flash, yet she was careful to close the door behind her. As she stood up against it he saw how beautiful she was—

that she was pale—that her hands were almost transparent.

‘Jeanne! Jeanne!’ he cried. ‘Why do you look like that?’

She did not answer, yet he seemed to hear her saying:

‘You ask? It is a year, and half a year, since that day——’

‘Jeanne!’ he said. ‘Dear Jeanne!’

But still she did not speak.

He caught her silence. The room was swimming, humming round them both. A loud noise beat at his heart.

‘Jeanne! dearest Jeanne!’ he whispered. ‘Now—always—both together!’

And in her happy heart Jeanne cried ‘*At last!*’ but with her lips she only said:

‘Lucien, it is too soon!’

CHAPTER XL

DAWN

‘You thought you could not write Songs if you cared for me,’ said Jeanne.

‘I was a fool!’ said Lucien, with conviction.

The day was wearing to its end. The sun had vanished early behind clouds that were dark with the whiteness that would soon cover the earth. Neither of them noticed it. Jeanne, the practical Jeanne, had forgotten everything. One duty she recollected, as, for the first time, she heard the city clocks give out the hour.

‘I must go to the Church of the Cordeliers,’ she said. ‘I have gone there every day to ask that you might be set free. I want to go now.’

‘I will go with you,’ said Lucien.

‘Monsieur de Civrac is here every morning to know if you have come, and Charles Blum every night. They both expected you. Charles Blum hates the marquis more than ever; but I think the marquis does not know he exists. How did you escape? Tell me!’

‘I was released without a word. I found that I was within a few miles of Morfontaine, and I walked there.’

‘Monsieur de Civrac told me he had some papers of yours that might embarrass the Government. He threatened at last to publish them if you were not released. He said that monsieur Berryer would pre-

vail with the Government in the end. Were you very miserable in prison, Lucien?’

‘Miserable? Oh no! I wrote a long poem in Alexandrines—the best thing I have done yet.’

Jeanne laughed.

‘After all, it is we three who were in prison,’ she said. ‘Oh, Lucien, why do we trouble about you? Whatever you do, and wherever you go, you are happy. I wish I were a poet.’

Perhaps nothing testified more fully to the fact that Lucien was in love than the fact that he did not shiver at this remark.

‘It is going to snow,’ she continued, as she looked out at the gloomy sky. ‘I must put on my cloak. No monsieur de Civrac! No Charles Blum! What can have become of them? Ah! they will be so happy, so happy that they will make friends!’

‘And you have been in danger?’

‘Oh no; I never thought about it. I stayed at home because the marquis said I should be there for you, if you came. Baby’s father is on the barricades. That is why I fetched her this afternoon, for the poor wife is anxious. Of course I went to church every day. Last night they were making powder and melting balls in the nave of the Cordeliers. Else I have seen nothing. Monsieur de Civrac says it will all be over to-morrow.’

Here and there, round great fires in the streets, pale soldiers were encamped. Lucien saw them; Jeanne scarcely noticed.

When they reached the Church, a strange sight met their eyes. It was crowded with fierce, thin men, carrying pistols, knives, sticks, any rough weapon

they had been able to pick up. Not a woman anywhere.

Jeanne knelt for a moment, resolutely closing her eyes. When she looked up, Blum was standing beside them, his hand in Lucien's hand. Silently he took hers, held them together. Jeanne bent her head. With a rush of self-accusing consciousness she understood he loved her—that he had loved her always. The knowledge of it struck Lucien like a blow.

'This is the last time we shall meet,' said Blum. 'It is over. Here we shall make our last stand to-morrow.'

'I am with you,' Lucien said. 'Tell me what I can do. I love these people. I have the right to lead them.'

'You shall command here,' said Blum, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. 'My place is out there on the barricade. First we will see you home, Mademoiselle Jeanne.'

'No,' she said; 'I cannot go home. I will stay here. If anyone is wounded, you will want a woman. I can bind up wounds. I know how. Lucien will tell you that I am a good nurse.'

Blum made no objection.

'We have an ambulance in the Lady Chapel,' he said. 'You can sleep there.'

All night long Lucien mused and watched outside the carved doors of the Lady Chapel. Without, upon the barricade, Blum watched and mused. But Jeanne slept blissfully.

Lucien rose at length, and looked steadily at the darkness.

'I owe it to Blum,' he said. 'I have taken his life,

I owe it to these people. I gave them mine. If no-one ever died, there would be no good Songs.'

With dawn of day the great Church was alive. A furious fight raged without. Two companies of the Line, sustained by artillery, attacked the barricade, and carried it after a struggle which halved the defenders.

By Lucien's order the door swung open to admit the wounded and those who were still alive, and closed again before the soldiers could leap down. At once there was a rush for them. They shuddered, yielded, fell, like live things beaten. A sergeant, his face black with powder, urged on the men with savage oaths in front, and bade them fire. A terrific discharge shook the very walls of the building. Lucien's ragged regiment had begun bravely enough, but now they broke and fled, rushing to shelter themselves behind the pillars in the Chapels. Lucien, Blum, and a dozen men round them, stood firm. Vainly the voices of the priests rose up, imploring mercy for those already vanquished. From the ranks of the foe the marquis de Civrac stepped forward, quiet, commanding, a sneer upon his lips.

'Does His Majesty war with women?' he asked pointing to Jeanne.

The eyes of the maddened soldiery struck down on her. She stood their gaze unshrinking. De Civrac turned the instant to account.

'If Monsieur Blum will give himself up,' said he, 'I will answer for it that the King's troops will not fire again. I will answer for his safety as for my own.'

'Traitor! traitor! He is betraying us. We want

no aristocrats in the army of the Citizen-King!' shouted the sergeant. 'Fire! Fire again!'

Cries of agonized terror rang through the Church.

One or two of the soldiers levelled their muskets at de Civrac. Blum came forward, pistol in hand, and took deliberate aim at him. He would have been killed but for Lucien, who dashed up to the highest step of the altar and began to sing.

A momentary pause followed, for the wild crowd that filled the Church, and the King's soldiers, saw a spirit.

With folded arms he stood singing, as once before—not laughing this time—his face radiant.

Blum let the pistol fall. The clang of it on the pavement broke the spell.

'Fire! fire!' cried the sergeant.

There was a sudden discharge.

When the smoke cleared away Lucien was lying down below, and the white steps of the altar were stained with blood.

They wrapped him in a long cloak, and laid him there where he had fallen, crossing the hands upon the breast.

The poor shoemaker, to whose child Jeanne had been good, led her home.

She said nothing, but the radiance of Lucien's eyes shone still in hers. Even he who loved most dared not pity her.

Quickly, silently they stole away, for everyone was weary to faintness, and yet more anxious than weary. Everyone had a sum that must be reckoned ere he could sleep—the sum of those left to him.

‘He sleeps well enough; no one will wake him,’ said a weaver.

‘He will watch the Host—that one—as well as if he were a regiment,’ cried one of the beggars.

A priest, who had worked hard all day, counselling, comforting, hearing confessions, cast a wistful look at the door of the Sacristy, hesitated an instant, took down the tall silver candlesticks, lighted the great wax candles, knelt down and crossed himself, and rose.

‘God will watch him!’ said he.

Then he also vanished, and the whole Church was wrapt in quiet darkness save for the burning island of light in the midst of which lay the dead.

Presently, with hushed footsteps, a worn and stately man drew near.

As he sat watching, his eyes watched the face of a woman whom he had helped to bury in the earth a long time ago.

There was a sound of rough moving on the pavement, and another man approached.

He, too, sat down to watch, and as he watched he, too, saw the face of a woman in whom, for him, the future lived. He hid his head in his hands.

Thus the hours passed, neither slowly nor quickly, over the three men, one asleep and two dreaming. Of the dreams, that which concerned the past was far less real than that which concerned the future. To Blum, strong in limited, solid, matter-of-fact power to strike a bargain with results, the immediate future—and for him there was no other—seemed more actual than that past which he had heard and seen, and in which he had lived, could be to the more speculative mind of the marquis.

At last, in the gray dawning, they saw the slender form of a girl, her head veiled, coming along the aisle.

By common consent they withdrew, turning away to one of the side-chapels.

Neither of them had looked at her, but when they were out of sight each looked at the other, and for the first time in life their eyes met.

‘He was my only memory!’ said de Civrac.

‘He was my one hope!’ said Blum; and they clasped hands.

The sun streamed through the great East window as they spoke, and made the candles dim.

THE END



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